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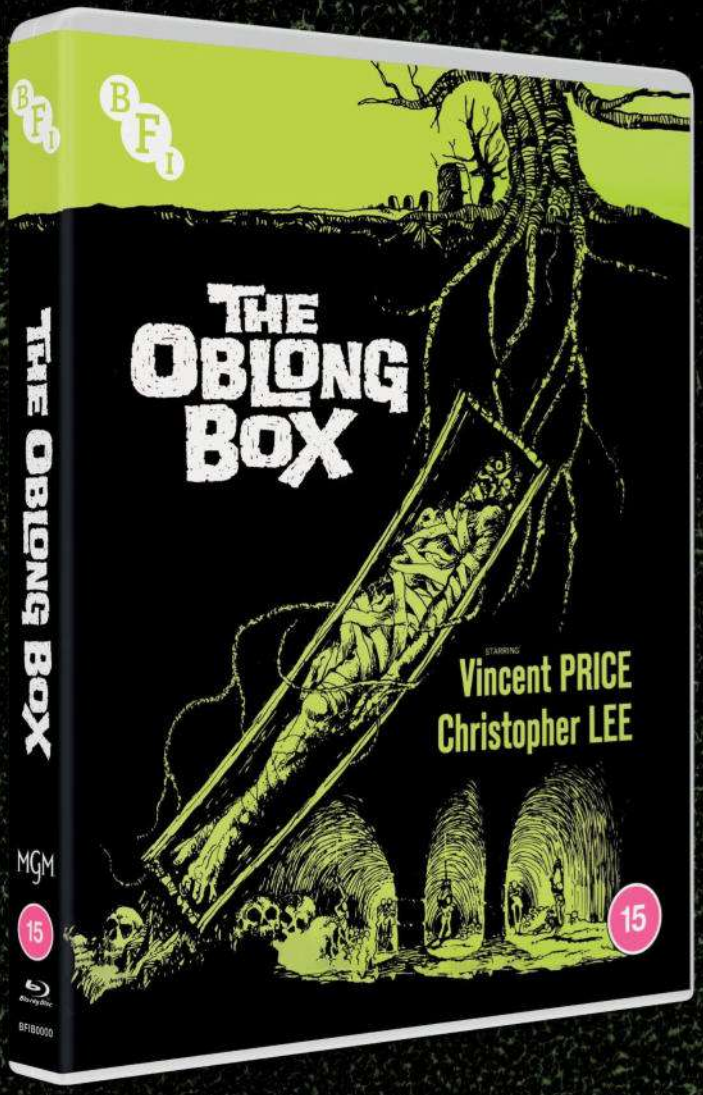

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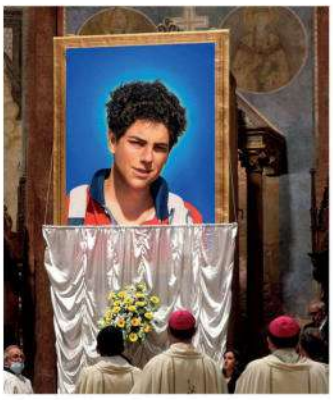

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COVER
ETIENNE GILFILLAN

PHOTO OF THE PARANORMAL RANGERS
COURTESY OF NETFLIX

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EDITORIAL

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

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WEIRDNESS IN THE WILD WEST... AND DRAGONS IN SURREY

Welcome to another oddity-packed issue, featuring everything from dragons, skinwalkers and sasquatches to the disappearance of Lord Lucan (50 years ago this month) and the equally mysterious appearance of plagues of golf balls in gardens and parking lots from Kent to Pennsylvania.

In our cover story, filmmaker Peter Broughan tells the story of the Navajo Nation's 'Paranormal Rangers', Stanley Milford Jr and Jonathan Dover, whose work investigating strange goings-on in the Navajo Nation is now the subject of a new book; their work offers a fascinating insight into how fortean events are interpreted through the lens of a specific Native American culture. High strangeness closer to home is provided by Richard Freeman's investigation into one of the unlikeliest of modern mysteries: a contemporary dragon sighting in, of all places, Surrey. Elsewhere, SD Tucker wonders how good SETI's antivirus software is, Karl Shuker reveals the truth about a viral Bigfoot video, and Alan Murdie examines the strange life and post-mortem appearances of legendary jockey Fred Archer. All this plus the world's first millennial saint, the fate of Columbus's bones and fish and ice falls galore...

NEW HOME SOUGHT FOR FORT SORT

It took some time to restore the hallowed tradition of the Fort Sort – in which fortean newspaper clippings are sorted into categories for archiving – after the disruption caused by the pandemic, and as our tenure at our current venue comes to an end we are looking for a new meeting place for our small team of sorters. The venue would need to be in London, preferably on the eastern side, free and available for one day per month. If you are able to help, please email the editor at drsutton@forteantimes.com with details.

SEASONAL READING

With Hallowe'en upon us and Christmas incoming, you may be wondering what to buy as a gift for family members, significant others or friends of a fortean bent. We would humbly suggest that our new special edition drawn from the FT archives and entitled *Poltergeist!* (does what it says on the tin) provides an ideal solution. With articles covering disturbing, destructive and sometimes dangerous hauntings from Enfield and South Shields to 19th century Canada and contemporary Turkey, plus new analysis and commentary from the tireless Alan Murdie, this makes perfect reading for long dark evenings; order your copy today! See p.21 for further details.

Also, thanks to the generosity of the lovely people at Watkins Publishing, we are giving away five sets of fortean and folkloric books in this month's competition – see opposite for details.

ERRATA

FT446:61: Mark Pearson emailed to correct a mistake in his letter about deadly punches, noting that he meant to say "18th century" rather than "17th century" when discussing the origins of bare-knuckle fighting; although he adds that "as a spectator sport – illegal or otherwise – it might well have started around then."

FT448:32: Matt Heslop writes: "In the article 'Fortean TV Revisited', Ryan Shirlow says that the artist Paul Laffoley is still going, but he's actually been dead since 2015." A quick check shows that, sadly, this is true.

COMPETITION

WIN!

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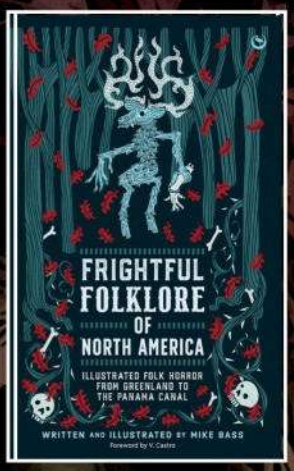
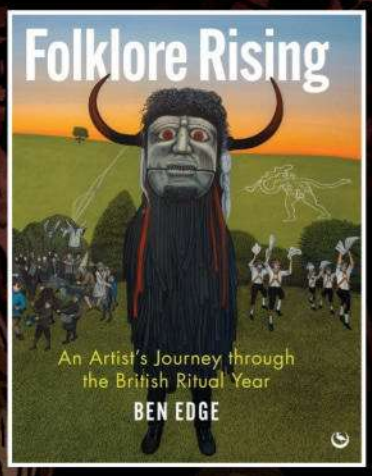
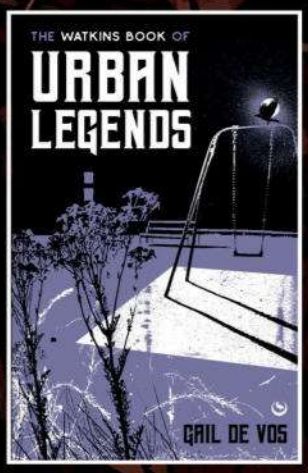

FRIGHTFUL FOLKLORE OF NORTH AMERICA
ILLUSTRATED FOLK HORROR FROM GREENLAND TO THE PANAMA CANAL
WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY MIKE BASS





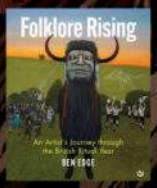
FRIGHTFUL FOLKLORE OF NORTH AMERICA

MIKE BASS

This beautifully illustrated book offers scary legends and folklore from Canada to Mexico and from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, including Native American tales, settlers' stories and African-American legends, as well as ghost stories and modern tales of cryptids. The book includes 75 of Mike Bass's colour linocut style artworks illustrating stories from the Ghost Moose of Maine, where hunters pursue a spectral creature until their fate is sealed, to the Goatman of Alton Bridge, recounting the legend of the Texas goat herder murdered in the early 1900s who returned as a half-goat, half-man to exact his terrible revenge. and many more...

FOLKLORE RISING

BEN EDGE



Ben Edge has travelled the length and breadth of Britain recording the weird and wonderful folk customs kept alive in communities all over the country. In this book he shares over 200 paintings and photographs, along with real-life stories, anecdotes and legends. He talks about how connecting with our incredible living folklore helped him recover from depression and introduces his idea of folklore activism, suggesting that the current resurgence of interest in contemporary folk culture represents ordinary people's desire to find new ways of envisioning community and caring for nature. Readers will be enchanted and inspired by Ben's journey.

THE WATKINS BOOK OF URBAN LEGENDS

GAIL DE VOS

A rich and captivating anthology of 200 urban legends and contemporary folk tales from around the world, curated by a leading authority on the subject and winner of the Storytelling World Award. This book is the first to gather all the dubious stories we love to share online, from *kittens in the washing machine* and *the pickled hand* to *the babysitter* or the tale of *a killer with a hook for a hand*. The book also examines how these stories mutate and spread around the world. Each urban legend comes with an accompanying note to provide context, whether they are new stories reflecting current concerns or old tales repurposed for new audiences.

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

DISCOVERER DISCOVERED

New DNA research suggests Columbus was a Spanish Jew

For much of the last 500 years, there have been arguments about who Christopher Columbus really was and, for at least the last 200 years, controversy about where he was buried. Now, a long-running genetic research project in Spain claims to have solved both problems, revealing its findings on national TV there on 12 October, Spain's national day, which commemorates Columbus's arrival in the New World on 12 October 1492.

To track down the explorer's true origins, the project needed a sample of his DNA, which, given that he has a splendid tomb in Seville Cathedral, should have been relatively easy to obtain; but, just as he was in life, Columbus turn out to have been somewhat restless in death, and Seville is not the only city that claims his remains. Columbus died in Valladolid, Spain, in 1506, but wanted to be buried on the island of Hispaniola, which today is split between Haiti and the Dominican Republic and is where he first made landfall in the New World. Columbus was initially buried in Valladolid, but was then moved to the monastery of La Cartuja in Seville. He eventually got his wish in 1542, when his body was once again disinterred and moved to Santo Domingo in what is now the Dominican Republic. He didn't stay put though; his body was moved to Havana, Cuba, in 1795, and then, in 1898, after Spain lost control of Cuba in the Spanish-American war, his remains were shipped back to Seville. Probably.

In 1877, after Columbus's remains had allegedly been shifted to Havana, excavations of Santo Domingo Cathedral turned up a small lead box of bone fragments inscribed "Illustrious and distinguished male, Don Cristóbal Colón" – i.e. Christopher Columbus. Yet more bones with a claim to belonging to Columbus turned up at his original Seville burial site in 1950, so confusion reigned as to who had the real Columbus.

To sort all this out, José Antonio Lorente, a forensic medical expert at the University of Granada in Spain, obtained DNA from the current Seville tomb and from the remains of Columbus's son Fernando and

POM² / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: The tomb of Christopher Columbus in Seville Cathedral. **BELOW:** Columbus meets the denizens of the New World in a 19th century lithograph. **BOTTOM:** The transfer of Columbus's remains from Santo Domingo to Havana in 1795.

Just as he was in life, Columbus was somewhat restless in death

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WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY

Robot skin, AI burgers and digital dogs

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MEDICAL MATTERS

The worm that ate part of RFK Junior's brain

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ARABIAN NIGHTMARES

Writer Robert Irwin remembered

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brother Diego, both of whom are also in Seville Cathedral and whose identity is not disputed. It has taken 20 years for genetic techniques to develop to the point where it was possible to make an identification based on the amount of DNA that could be extracted from Columbus's supposed bones and compared to those of his son and brother, but on 10 October Lorente and his team were able to announce: "Today, thanks to new technology, the previous partial theory that the remains in Seville are those of Christopher Columbus has been definitively confirmed." They did, though, acknowledge that the competing remains in Santa Domingo could also be genuine, as both sets of bones are only partial, but those have not been tested.

RTVE

LEFT: Forensics expert José Antonio Lorente in the new Spanish documentary *Columbus DNA: His True Origin*.

Confirmation that the bones in the Seville tomb were indeed Columbus opened the way for research to solve the other mystery – where did Columbus come from? For many years, the consensus was that he was probably born in Genoa, now in Italy, which in Columbus's day was part of the Spanish Kingdom of Aragon. However, there were up to 25 contenders with various degrees of credibility – including other parts of Italy or Spain as well as Sweden, Norway, Portugal, France, Greece and even Scotland – which geneticists whittled down to a final eight for close scrutiny. "Twenty-five possible origins and eight finalists, but there can be only one," as Spanish broadcaster RTVE said while promoting the programme announcing Lorente's findings. The result, though, was a surprise; Lorente concluded that Columbus was a Spanish Jew, saying: "We have DNA from his son Fernando Colón, and in both the Y [male] chromosome and mitochondrial DNA [transmitted by the mother] of Fernando there are traces compatible with a Jewish origin." They acknowledged their data were not good enough to pinpoint an exact city of origin for Columbus, but added: "The DNA indicates that Christopher Columbus's origin lay in the western Mediterranean. As there weren't Jews in Genoa in the 15th century, the likelihood that he was from there is minimal. Neither was there a big Jewish presence in the rest of the Italian peninsula, which makes things very tenuous." After discounting Sicily for various contextual reasons, they decided that "his most likely origin is in the Spanish Mediterranean area or the Balearic islands, which belonged to the crown of Aragón at the time."

However, Lorente's findings did not meet with universal acclaim. Rodrigo Barquera, an archæogeneticist at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, was surprised that the team had announced their results on television without publishing in a scientific journal, while Antonio Alonso, former director of Spain's National Institute of Toxicology and Forensic Sciences, said: "We can't really evaluate what was in the documentary because they offered no data from the analysis whatsoever." However, Lorente responded: "Our team and the university have always considered this study into Christopher Columbus and his family as a single, joined-up and inseparable unit, and nothing will be published until the investigation is completed."

Assuming Lorente's analysis is correct, Columbus's origins are particularly ironic. At the same time as he was opening the door for Spain to enrich itself through looting the Americas, his sponsors, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabela, were conducting a savage persecution of the Jews. This culminated in 1492, the year Columbus arrived on Hispaniola, when Spanish Jews were either expelled, forcibly converted, or burned at the stake, something that Spain has described as "a historic mistake", perhaps something of an understatement. *theguardian.com, 11+13 Oct; the-express.com, 12 Oct 2024.*

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BULL'S BID TO SCRATCH 'ITCHY BUM' CUTS OFF POWER TO 800 HOMES

BBC News, 8 May 2020.

New forest water park postpones opening due to flooding

BBC News, 23 Mar 2024.

TWO SAN FRANCISCO NUDISTS SAVE MAN FROM BEING ATTACKED IN STREET BY A "CRAZY KIND OF PIRATE GUY" WITH A BLOWTORCH

boingboing.net, 12 July 2024.

Sinner cleared after testing positive twice for banned substance

BBC News, 20 Aug 2024.

SIDELINES

BAG REUNITED

Thirty years after her handbag was stolen from her workplace in Aberdeen, Audrey Hay never expected to see it again. However, walking on the beach near the mouth of the River Don in January this year, 11-year-old Maisie Coutts found it. "I was just walking around with my dog and my mum and dad and then I pointed out 'oh, there's a handbag'," she said. Looking inside, they found lipstick and earrings, as well as a credit card that enabled them to track down Hay online and reunite her with the bag. "It's amazing it has survived," she said. *<i> 5 Jan 2024.*

FAKE FALLS

A hiker seeking the source of the famed Yuntai Mountain Waterfall, billed as "China's tallest uninterrupted waterfall", discovered that this was, in fact, a pipe built into the cliff face. They posted a video of the pipe on social media, prompting Yuntai tourism park to admit they made a "small enhancement" to the falls during the dry season so visitors wouldn't feel disappointed. This didn't stop "Yuntai Waterfall is just some pipes" trending though. The video got more than 14 million views on Weibo and nearly 10 million views on Douyin. *BBC News, 6 Jun 2024.*

FRIGHTFUL FIND

While magnet fishing off the Bayou St John Bridge in New Orleans, a local resident hauled up a human skull padlocked to a 15-lb (6.8kg) exercise dumbbell, baffling police. They reported that the skull had been "fully decomposed, lacking a jaw or the top row of teeth" when it was thrown into the water, but had no idea as to its identity or why it might have been dumped in the bayou. [AP] *2 Jun 2024.*

MARTIN ROSS

WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY...

THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF TAXIS

The Waymo autonomous taxi company has been trialling its driverless vehicle service in San Francisco for several years, with mixed results. Its driverless taxis have exasperated locals by doing things like blocking traffic, obstructing emergency services, killing a dog, and getting stuck in wet concrete, prompting them to fight back by placing traffic cones on the cars' bonnets, which confuses their computer systems and brings them to a grinding halt (see **FT437:7**).

Now, they are driving residents of the SoMa district to distraction by their night time behaviour. Since July, as they return to the Waymo parking lot there, the taxis have taken to honking at each other. "It's very distracting during the workday, but most importantly it wakes you up at four in the morning," said Christopher Cherry, who lives nearby. The honking peaks in the early hours of the morning when few taxis are needed and most return to base, where their proximity sensors are triggered by other returning cars manœuvring on the lot, causing them to honk at each other in warning. "We recently introduced a useful feature to help avoid low speed collisions by honking if other cars get too close while reversing toward us," a Waymo spokesperson said. "It has been working great in the city, but we didn't quite anticipate it would happen so often in our own parking lots."

Waymo updated the software to try and stop the honking but was not entirely successful. The day after the alleged fix, several of the taxis inexplicably overshot the parking lot and got trapped in a nearby cul-de-sac, where they continually got in each other's way as they attempted to extricate themselves, leading to another flurry of honking; then a queue formed at the lot's entrance as taxis tried to get in and a car manœuvring near the first one caused it to reverse, setting off a chain reaction through the queue, accompanied by incessant honking, continuing the torture for neighbours. *theverge.com, 1 Aug; independent.co.uk, 14 Aug 2024.*

> *The honking peaks in the early hours of the morning*

AI SCREAM, YOU SCREAM....

In 2019, with great fanfare, McDonalds announced a partnership with IBM to use AI and voice recognition software to take orders in its restaurants. This July, with rather less fanfare, they announced they were going to remove the system from the 100 restaurants in which they had been trialling it, saying, "After thoughtful review, McDonald's has decided to end our current global partnership with IBM on AOT (Automated Order Taking) beyond this year."

While AOT had initially caused a furore about taking people's jobs, it was its determinedly random interpretation of customer orders that got it the chop. Among the things the system decided customers wanted were ice cream topped with bacon, hundreds of chicken nuggets, and multiple unwanted cups of tea. One viral TikTok video shows an increasingly frustrated young woman trying to explain to the system that she wants caramel ice cream, while it repeatedly responds by adding multiple pats of butter to her order. Despite this, McDonalds optimistically asset that AOT would still be "part of its restaurants' future". *BBC News, 1 Jun 2024.*

IT'S ALIVE!

A team at Tokyo University has found a way to give robots faces made of living human skin. They started by growing human skin cells in the lab to create a soft, flexible sheet that can heal if cut, but found it difficult to attach to a robot; the tiny hooks they first tried tore the skin when the robot moved. However, by copying the way the human

TAKEUCHI ET AL

TOP: Waymo driverless taxis are returning to their San Francisco parking lot and honking at each other. **ABOVE:** A new method of binding living skin tissue to a robotic skeleton will allow more humanlike expressions according to researchers in Tokyo.

WORLD AI CREATOR AWARDS

ABOVE: AI-generated "Moroccan lifestyle influencer" Kenza Layli has been unveiled as the world's first AI beauty pageant winner. **BELOW:** The latest robot dogs can create 'denial-of-service' events to disable Internet-connected devices.

body grows skin, they succeeded. They simulated human ligaments by creating strands of flexible collagen and elastin that they spread as a gel on the robot, secured by thousands of tiny holes in its surface. The skin then successfully bound to this. "The natural flexibility of the skin and the strong method of adhesion mean the skin can move with the mechanical components of the robot, without tearing or peeling away," said lead researcher Professor Shoji Takeuchi. His team are now working on enabling the skin-wearing robot to form human-like expressions using actuators of muscles inside the device and can already make the robot produce a rudimentary smile. *BBC News, 25 Jun 2024.*

AI-LIEN BEAUTIES

The *World AI Creator Awards* haven't bothered with trying to physically simulate humans, instead going totally digital and staging "Miss AI", a beauty pageant for entirely AI-generated women. The team who devised the award put out a request for entries from creators, or team of creators, who used AI programmes like DALL·E 3, Midjourney or Stable Diffusion to generate images of beautiful women from text prompts. They then selected 10 finalists from the more than 1,500 submitted for a final that was broadcast online on 16 July.

Won by Kenza Layli, a "Moroccan lifestyle influencer" whose goal is to "contribute to the empowerment of women in Morocco and the Middle East", the competition was billed as a way to showcase and demystify the potential of AI. It was, though, condemned by critics of AI. "I think we're starting to increasingly lose touch with what an unedited face looks like," said Dr Kerry McInerney from the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, adding that AI is just "capturing the existing beauty norms we have which are actively sexist, actively fatphobic, actively colourist, then they're compiling and reiterating them."

However, Sofía Novales, whose team created the AI model Aitana López who "sat" on the pageant's judging panel said, "We are not here to solve this long-standing problem," while her fellow judge Sally-Ann Fawcett said, "We wanted women who are more diverse in every way, in size, in age, in flaws… It's taken 50 years for pageants to get where they are today, with AI it can be done on fast forward." *editions.cnn.com, 27 Jun 2024.*

HOT DIGITAL DOG!

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has invested in a robot dog to which they have added an antenna array so that they can use it to disable "Internet of things" (IOT) smart home devices. Officers fear that suspects might booby trap houses using IOT technology, so have built this system, called NEO, which they can send into a house ahead of them to deal with the threat. "NEO carries an onboard computer and antenna array that will allow officers the ability to create a 'denial-of-service' (DoS) event to disable 'Internet of Things' devices that could potentially cause harm while entry is made," said Benjamine Huffman from the DHS. *404media.co, 22 Jul 2024.*

GHOST ROBOTICS

SIDELINES

WHY?

Dylan Phillips, 38, has set the world record for the fastest motorised wheelbarrow, hitting 52mph (84km/h) during speed tests at Elvington Airfield in Yorkshire, comfortably beating the previous record of 46mph (74km/h). Built out of a combination of a wheelbarrow and a scrap scooter, the vehicle was "uncomfortable and terrifying" to drive said Phillips, but he added that beating the record felt "fun and surreal." *BBC News, 6 Jun 2024.*

OUT THERE

A court hearing in Sydney, Australia, decided that Bilal Fadel was not guilty of charges of murder and attempted murder on grounds of mental impairment. He had killed one friend and seriously wounded another while in the grip of a delusion that he was Donald Trump's floor sander and as a result was being pursued by the Illuminati in planes and helicopters. Voices had told him to kill his friends and buy drugs to "free the slaves". Bilal remembers nothing of the attacks and the court remanded him to the custody of forensic mental health experts. *D.Telegraph (Sydney), 15 May 2024.*

DUCK TO WATER

Called out to rescue someone in black and yellow clothes reported to be in difficulty in the sea off Milford on Sea, Hampshire, a lifeboat, helicopter and Coastguard vessel scoured the area in vain for an hour. Eventually they realised the "person" was an inflatable duck that had, by then, washed up on Lymington beach. Lifeboat helmsman Greg Pachany said, "The person who called 999 did absolutely the right thing." *Sun, 5 May 2024.*

ALIENS GO HOME

Paranormal writer Ron Halliday has decided that Orkney's Neolithic sites were built to fight off aliens. "There are some Pictish stones with pictures of folk kind of fleeing things. I thought this represents an attack from the sky," he says. "There are questions about whether Skara Brae or Maeshowe were intended as protection form nuclear war and an ancient battle with aliens." He accuses archæologists of hiding the truth. *D.Star, 19 Jun 2024.*

SIDELINES...

LONG SHOT

Nafferton Youth Football Club in Yorkshire were baffled when they got sent one of their lost footballs by Renske Schoor from the Netherlands, who had found it washed up on a beach on Terschelling, a small island off the coast of Holland. He had spotted the club's name written on the ball and posted it back. Club Chairman Sean Gibson, 42, admitted that he had no idea how their ball might have ended up on Terschelling, but thought it might have been lost during an away game in Hull and washed down the Humber and out to sea. *D.Mirror, 15 Jun 2024.*

BABY DRIVER

Police in St Louis, Missouri, pulled over an erratically driven car to find its owner, Latonta Mayes-Gale, 28, asleep on the back seat and her eight-year-old son at the wheel. The child explained his mother had said she was too tired to drive and had asked him to take over. As a result, Mayes-Gale was charged with endangering the welfare of a child and traffic offences. *D.Mirror, 15 Jun 2024.*

ARRRRR!

The first annual Space Piracy Conference has been announced for February 2025, to take place at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Organised by the Center for the Study of Space Crime, Piracy, and Governance, it is not for space pirates but is an "invite only symposium that brings together experts prepared to review crime, piracy, and smuggling in space". Organiser Marc Feldman says, "Now is the time to start thinking and talking about mitigating the threat of piracy in space," adding, "As we like to say, you may not be interested in space piracy, but space pirates are interested in you..." *cscpg.org, 11 Jun 2024.*

MARTIN ROSS

LOOK OUT BELOW!

Fish falls, goat-flattening ice chunks and monster hailstones

ABOVE: Frames from the video allegedly showing a fish fall in the Iranian city of Yasouj; analysis has cast doubt on its authenticity. **BELOW:** Also being circulated as evidence of the fall was this photograph of a catfish spill in Kailin, China in 2015.

IRAN'S PHANTOM FISHMONGERS

A video allegedly showing a fish fall in the central Iranian city of Yasouj went viral in May. In it, large live fish can be seen plummeting from above during a heavy rainstorm, landing on a busy road. Despite the impact, the fish can be seen flapping about, and the video maker picks up a still living one, holding it up for the camera. The fish appears to be almost a foot (30cm) long and undamaged by its fall. In some versions of the video that were circulated, it then cuts away to show a road littered with a prodigious number of large fish that people are collecting in buckets.

While many media outlets uncritically accepted this as a genuine event, then trotted out the old "whirlwind" explanation, there were doubts expressed in some quarters about the veracity of the video. Despite being a long way inland, Yasouj is a city famed in Iran for its fish farms and, although he hasn't been identified by name, it is alleged that the man filming the video is a fishmonger, with easy access to live fish. The fish in the video

It is alleged that the man filming the video is a fishmonger

are also considerably larger than the fish seen in most classic fish falls and seem to be suspiciously uninjured by their sudden descent. This also looks to be taking place much more slowly than might be expected if they were falling from a great height. In addition, no one in the video apart from the man filming it seems to be reacting to the fish, and official Iranian media made no reference to the incident; indeed, the sole evidence that the fall happened at all seems to be this single video.

Analysis of the video by Hafiz Malik, a professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Michigan, showed that fish in the footage disappear briefly at some points, and that in other places the video shows the reflections or shadows from cars but not the falling fish. He suggests that the video could have been created by combining footage of the street with unrelated footage of fish at the surface of a body of water. The later portions of the video showing people collecting a profusion of fish from the street have been shown to be completely unrelated to the alleged Iranian fall; they come from an incident in Kailin, China, which took place in March 2015. There, the doors of a truck transporting catfish unexpectedly swung open, dumping nearly 15,000 lb (7000kg) of them into the street, creating a bonanza for locals who swiftly gathered to scoop the fish up (see **FT327:6**). So, despite causing quite a stir, this video seems to be a well-constructed fake, rather than showing a genuine fall.

Iran has form with this kind of thing. In late April 2018, there was a fall of fish reported in Golpayegen, a city in Isfahan Province, which also came with a video. This showed many small fish, of a size more consistent with those in usual fish falls, scattered along a wet highway, some still alive and moving. Local authorities then were unable to confirm that the fish had fallen from the sky and reported suspicions that the fish were fingerlings that had come from a truck transporting them from another city. Indeed, in the video a large truck can be seen stopped some way down the road. The truck theory is also supported by the

JEFF LEVINE

ABOVE: The shattered windshield of Jeff Levine's car after a large fish fell from the sky and smashed into it leaving clearly visible scales and blood. **BELOW:** The monster hailstone photographed by Val Castor after a thunderstorm in Vigo Park, Texas.

fact that the small fish can be seen to be spread along only one carriageway of the road, which would be the case if they had fallen from a moving vehicle. There was also an Iranian video that claimed to show a fall of aubergines that went viral in the country in 2020 (**FT394:12**) and this, too, was swiftly shown to be fake. In that case five people were arrested by authorities for making the video. *intellinews.com, 5 May; dailystar.co.uk, 6 May; eu.usatoday.com, 22 May; thefortean.com, 24 Apr 2018.*

FISHY MESSAGE

In July, Cynthia and Jeff Levine were startled by their Tesla, which was parked in the driveway of their house in Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey. "The car started honking, went crazy honking, which we never heard, and I didn't know how to turn it off," said Cynthia. Going to check on the car, she said, "We were like, 'Holy crap! Look at this! It looks like fish scales and blood on the windshield." Their video doorbell recorded what had happened; a large fish had fallen out of a clear sky and smacked into their vehicle, triggering the alarm. "We're thinking somebody threw it at the car," Jeff said, but Cynthia concluded, "We have an eagle's nest in our yard in the back, so we think it was probably the eagle," with the bird dropping its catch on the car on the way back to its nest. "It's a message from God," said Cynthia, adding "We're glad it didn't hit us." *kcrg.com, 23 Jul 2024.*

ICE OVER AMERICA

In Patterson, New Jersey, the Gomez family had a lucky escape. They were sitting round a table in their backyard when, in the words of Sabrina Gomez, "Out of nowhere, you just hear a hollow sound coming down, and honestly, we didn't think anything of it, and then you just hear a big DOOOOSH!" A large chunk of ice had smashed through the roof of their house, less than 12ft (3.7m) from where they were sitting. As well as damaging their roof so badly that it is likely to need complete replacement, the plummeting icicle left shattered debris all over the drive. "When we look up, it's basically like a plane flying by," Selina said, suspecting that to be the source of the ice, adding, "Honestly, it was a little terrifying, but thank God it didn't hit anybody, and it hit the floor. It hit the roof, thank God."

A goat was not so lucky in Eagle Mountain, Utah. Around 9.30am on 6 May, Cassidy Lewis heard a massive bang that shook her entire house. Going outside, Lewis found "Roosters were freaking out; the horses were going crazy." She then saw a large hole in the roof of a shed where she kept her goats. Inside the shed, ice chunks were scattered around and one of the goats was lying injured and bleeding. Lewis took her goat to a vet, who found that the animal was too badly injured to survive and put it down. "It was at least a basketball-sized piece of ice, I would assume, especially because the size of the hole and how much ice there was on the ground," said Lewis. Local police examining the damage told her that, as her farm was under the flight path from Salt Lake City International Airport, it was likely that the ice had fallen from an aircraft.

VAL CASTOR

Unusual ice in Texas had a more natural origin. While pursuing a major thunderstorm system through the town of Vigo Park, veteran storm chasers Val and Amy Castor spotted a hailstone more than 7 inches (17.78cm) long beside the road. Val Castor said that several baseball-sized hailstones fell while he was driving, including one that cracked his windshield, and then he spotted the giant one in a ditch, saying, "I could see it from probably 100 yards away," before stopping to scoop it up. The massive hailstone, almost the size of a pineapple, is believed to be a new state record, beating a 6.4in (16.25cm) example found in Hondo in 2021. *nypost.com, 14 Jun; metro.co.uk,10 May; apnews.com, 6 Jun 2024.*

SIDELINES...

COCK UP

Prison officer Christian Gomez, 40, accidentally triggered alarms by wearing a metal penis ring to work at HMP Forest Bank in Salford. This led to him being searched, which revealed he was smuggling tobacco and cannabis into the prison. Police then raided Gomez's home and discovered a stash of more than £15,000 worth of drugs. As a result, he returned to jail, this time as an inmate with a 28-month sentence. *Sun, 7 May 2024.*

NAME!

Telling the story of his penile cancer, penis removal, and subsequent recovery in the *Daily Mail*, was Craig Mycock, 54, a former bus driver from Stockport. *D.Mail, 18 Jun 2024.*

OUTFOXED

RSPCA officer Ben Fitzcosta set up his mobile phone to film his rescue of an injured fox in Bagshot, Surrey, but when he turned round to retrieve it, it had mysteriously vanished. He eventually found the phone dumped in nearby bushes. Fitzcosta only realised that another fox had sneaked up and stolen the phone when he played back the video and saw that he had caught the thief on camera. *Metro, 16 Feb 2024.*

COMING CLEAN

Police searching for a 31-year-old man wanted in connection with a shooting in southwest Florida eventually tracked him down during a search of his house. They found that he had managed to fold himself into a domestic tumble dryer in an attempt to evade the officers. "He was pulled from the dryer one limb at a time as he clung to his hideout," said a sheriff's office spokesperson. *D.Mirror, 25 May 2024.*

PIG OUT

Animal welfare officers rescued a giant pot-bellied pig from a one-bedroom flat in Manchester where it had been kept with no access to the outdoors. Portia had ballooned to 26 stone (165kg) after being fed on a diet of junk food and Coke while being kept as a house pig, but rapidly shed weight and regained mobility after going into rehab at Whitegate Animal Sanctuary on Merseyside, where she ate pig pellets, fruit and vegetables. "We've basically managed to get her back to being a pig," said a sanctuary spokesperson. *Sun, 10 Jul 2024.*

SIDELINES...

RE-MARK-ABLE!

Mark Garland, 58, a bus driver from Trowbridge in Wiltshire, found himself sitting next to his lookalike on a flight from Heathrow to Bangkok. This turned out to be Mark Garland, 62, a Bristol builder. Both love Thailand and have visited multiple times, and they also realised that they have a friend in common. *Metro, 6 Mar 2024.*

FISHY BUSINESS

Between August and October last year, large fish were repeatedly found taped to cash machines around Provo, Utah, and, on occasion, to police cars. All the incidents had been documented on an Instagram account belonging to "fish_bandit84," with the tagline, "Live, laugh, tape fish on ATMs" and the assertion "No fish were harmed in the process", which led police to arrest a 17-year-old boy. Authorities said they believed this was innocent fun, but charged the teen with two misdemeanour counts of causing property damage. It was unclear where he got the fish from. *huffingtonpost.com, 24 Jan 2024.*

NOT A GOAT RODEO

Meanwhile, on a golf course at Silvies Valley Ranch in the Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon, goats are belying their reputation for capriciousness. The resort features a seven-hole challenge course which is far too steep to use golf carts on, so instead they have introduced a team of rigorously trained goats to carry clubs for the players. "A lot of people said it was a stupid idea," said ranch owner Scott Campbell, adding that now, "The real, real serious golfers, they kind of scoff at it, but they still get their picture taken with the goats." *editions.cnn.com, 11 Jun 2024.*

MARTIN ROSS

DOORSTOP DELIGHT | Experts find Romanian rock to be valuable lump of amber

PROVINCIAL MUSUM OF BUZAU

ABOVE: The 3.5kg (7.7lb) lump of amber that had been used for decades as a doorstop. **BELOW**: The world's largest piece of amber weighs in at 68.20kg (150.35lb).

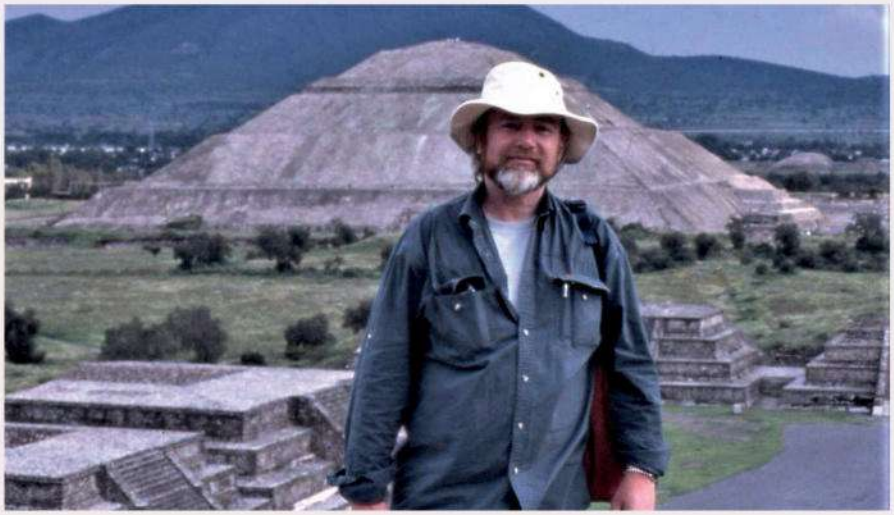
Decades after his relative found an attractive 3.5kg (7.7lb) stone in a stream near her house and took it home to use as a doorstop, a man from Colti, Romania, had it appraised by experts as he suspected it was more than just a stone. Geologists at the Museum of History in Krakow in Poland concluded that it was, in fact, a huge piece of amber, one of the biggest ever discovered, and was worth in the region of 1 million euros (£835,540). A form of amber, known as rumanite, has been mined in the Colti area since the 1920s and is prized for its rich red hue. The owner sold it to the Romanian state who acclaimed the nugget as a national treasure and put it on display in the Provincial Museum of Buzau, near where it was found. This follows the 2018 case where a Michigan farmer discovered that the rock holding his barn door open was a rare meteorite worth $100k (see **FT428:8**).

The largest known piece of amber weighs a whopping 68.20kg (150.35 lb), as ratified by Guinness World Records in June 2022, and was found in a lignite mine near the town of Gunung Tua in northern Sumatra. It is now held in the Museum of Amber, a department of the Museum of Gdańsk in Poland. *sciencealert.com, 11 Sept 2024.*

PAUL DEVEREUX rounds up the latest discoveries from Mexico, China and Peru's Nazca Plateau

SUN, MOON AND PYRAMIDS

Teotihuacan (100 BC – AD 800) is a pre-Aztec city located near present-day Mexico City. Little is known about the people who built and lived in it, but it has a vast and remarkable rectilinear layout (engraved surveyors' benchmarks have been found on some building foundations) and may have had up to 100,000 inhabitants. A straight ceremonial road ("Causeway of the Dead") cuts through the city leading to the so-called Pyramid of the Moon (140ft/43m tall), passing by an even larger pyramid, the so-called Pyramid of the Sun (215ft/65m tall). "So-called" because these names were given by the Aztecs centuries after Teotihuacan was abandoned, and they didn't know who the Teotihuacanos were. New scientific studies raise further issues concerning both pyramids. According to a bulletin from Mexico's INAH (National Institute of Anthropology and History), researchers using multiple measurements and drone flights found that the northeast corner of the Pyramid of the Moon aligns with the Sun when it rises over the El Xihuingo volcano on the summer solstice (21 June) annually in the Northern Hemisphere, and that that the southwest corner of the pyramid aligns with the Sun as it sets behind a hill during the winter solstice (21 December). Ironically, the Pyramid of the Sun has been found to align similarly diagonally to the two lunar standstills (see this column **FT447:12**). So, on the face of it, the Aztecs got it all wrong. *LiveScience, 27 July 2024; INAH Bulletin, 411 12.07.24.*



PAUL DEVEREUX

WENYING LI

ABOVE: Paul Devereux standing atop the Pyramid of the Moon, Teotihuacan, with the Pyramid of the Sun behind. **LEFT:** One of the cheesy Chinese mummies. **BELOW:** A 72-foot (22m) long killer whale apparently holding a weapon was one of the geoglyphs identified in a new AI-assisted study.

A PUZZLE SOLVED

Researchers studying 3,600-year-old mummies from the Xiaohe Cemetery in northwestern China's Tarim Basin years ago were puzzled to find the heads and necks of the mummies smeared with a mysterious white substance. But since 2014 the nature of the substance was gradually worked out, and now a team studying its DNA report in the science journal, *Cell*, that the white stuff is, of all things, *cheese.* To be precise, kefir cheese – kefir grains being described as "a symbiotic matrix of bacteria and yeasts".

"This is the oldest known cheese sample ever discovered in the world," writes the *Cell* paper's senior author, Qiaomei Fu, a palæontologist at the Institute of Vertebrate Palæontology and Palæoanthropology at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing. "Food items like cheese are extremely difficult to preserve over thousands of years, making this a rare and valuable opportunity." Why it was thought necessary to provide the mummies with cheese, though, remains unanswered. *LiveScience, 25 Sept 2024. (Original sources: Journal of Archæological Science, May 2014. Cell, 25 Sept 2022/ online Oct 2024.)*

AI SPY

It's now well-known that Peru's Nazca Plateau (desert tableland) contains geoglyphs – ground markings – of a variety of images, produced by removal of the darker, oxidised, desert surface revealing lighter subsoil. Probably the best-known types of markings are the 'Nazca lines', straight markings of varying widths radiating out from (or converging onto) what are called 'ray centres'; some show well-worn human tracks within them, so may have been ritual or pilgrimage pathways. But there are also older, pre-Incan markings depicting abstract patterns like spirals and a wide range of creatures, including spiders, monkeys, flowers, hummingbirds and even some bizarre human-like figures. Most are very large, some hundreds of feet in extent – perhaps intended to be seen by the gods. They are formed with unicursal lines, so it has been suggested they were used as linear group dance paths. But there are smaller, relief-style images too, on average only 9m (30ft) in size, and often depicting humanoid figures and domesticated animals. Over nearly a century, hundreds of them have been noted and photographed from the air. But now, over 300 more, too faint to be noticed by the human eye, have been identified and recorded with the assistance of AI (artificial intelligence) technology over a six-month period: it is rightly called "AI accelerated survey". *PNAS, 121 (40), Sept. 2024.* https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2407652121

MASATO SAKAI

AN UNKNOWN CITY

An extraordinary archæological discovery has been made in the ancient, long-abandoned Maya city of Cobá on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. It is a huge carved slab ($11m^2$ / $119ft^2$) that had formed the bottom of a sacred pool near the Nohoch Mul pyramid. The whole surface of the slab is covered by 123 glyphs using a stylised script carefully carved into the stone in an L-shaped arrangement fitting the slab's shape. These detail information about Mayan rulers and gods, but the most fascinating section tells of the founding of a hitherto unknown city, called Keh Witz Nal ("Deer Mountain"), in AD 569. A lost city not yet found. Archæologists have been restoring the slab to preserve it, and have made a 3D replica of it to allow in-depth study without further disturbance. *Science Alert, 15 Aug 2024.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

304: FAHRENHEIT CCCCLI, PART 2

Had Ray Bradbury used the other system, his title would have had to be *Celsius 232.778*.

Full subject survey by HA Bosmaijian, *Burning Books* (2006). On the classical side, CA Forbes, 'Books for the Burning,' *Transactions of the American Philological Society* 67 (1936), 114-25 (online). Also, I Sluiter & R Rosen (eds.), *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity* (2017). Wikipedia has an immense list of book-burnings from ancient times to Islamic State incinerations.

Outside pseudo-communist states and extreme Islamic ones, Eire and South Africa may have been the worst offenders in our time. A century or so ago, censors ran amok both in America and Canada, Petronius's *Satyricon* being a particular target along with anything homosexual – on the latter see Naomi Wolf's *Outrage, Censorship and the Criminalization of Love*.

When I arrived in Australia in 1962, I was astonished to find banned not only *Lady C* but the Penguin special on its British trial, also Ian Fleming's *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Across in New Zealand, there was somewhat more tolerance, even a Henry Miller (*Nexus*) being on open sale.

Speaking in defence of democracy, Euripides (himself no stranger to harassment) makes his character Theseus proclaim (*Suppliants*, vv438-41): "This is indeed liberty: if anybody wants, for the city's sake, to introduce good counsel, and if whoever wants this approved, and he who doesn't is silent. What can be more equal in the city than this?"

John Milton inserted his own version in the preface to *Areopagitica*; for his distortions, see John Illo, 'Euripides, Milton, and Thomas Cooper,' *Milton Quarterly* 26, 1992, 81-4 – Cooper was Milton's editor.

The Athenian democracy's slogan was PARRHESIA = Freedom of Speech, prefiguring the American constitution's First Amendment. However, in both societies, there were several attempts by individuals to curb this, albeit (as we shall later see) not with the same motivations as Anthony Comstock (USA – see Wolf's book) or Mrs Whitehouse.

First knowable case came up in 494 BC. The Persians had just captured Miletus with sack and slaughter. I'll let Herodotus (bk6 ch21 para2) tell the tale: "When Phrynichus produced his play *The Capture of Miletus*, the audience in the theatre burst into tears. The author was fined a thousand drachmæ for reminding them of a disaster which touched them closely, and they forbade anyone ever to put the play on the stage again." The ban worked: the play is lost.

INDEX
Librorum Prohibitorum
BENEDICTI XIV. P.O.M.
jussu editus.
Multi eorum, qui fuerant curiosa sectati, contulerunt Libros, et combusserunt coram omnibus.
Act. Cap. XIX. V. 19.

ABOVE: A book-burning session from an edition of the Catholic Church's *Index of Forbidden Books*.

This happened more than a century before Aristotle (*Poetics*) aired his theory of Catharsis, by which audiences have their emotions purged by the effects of Tragedy-watching.

This is Catharsis *en masse*. Does it work individually? There is endless debate about the influence – if any – of particular books, films, television – add porn if you will. I've always been amused by the Loeb translator of Martial who put the 'dirty ones' into Italian: presumably he reckoned Italians either incorruptible or corrupt beyond redemption.

I remember Sir Basil Blackwell during his evidence at the trial of Hubert Selby's

Last Exit to Brooklyn that he felt corrupted by it. Must admit I felt it a degrading read.

In 439 BC, the archon (top elected official) Morychides introduced a decree banning the writers of Old Comedy from insulting individuals by name. This seems to have lapsed in 437. A certain Syracosius is said to have re-introduced such a prohibition in 415, as may have the (to us) equally shadowy Antimachus. There is some hint that Pericles himself wanted to curb Aristophanes and company – not surprising given the invective hurled at him and his blue-stocking mistress Aspasia: some of it makes our 'trolling' seem tame.

Stephen Halliwell unravels all this in 'Comic Satire and Freedom of Speech in Classical Athens,' *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 111 (1991), 45-70 (available online).

The eleven surviving plays of Aristophanes are proof of these Lord Chamberlain-like interferences' futility. Obscenity in itself was not the issue. In the *Frogs* for easy instance, the god Dionysus, patron of the theatre, is mocked for wanking over a copy of Euripides's erotic *Andromeda* – her image was appropriated in Madonna's silly *Sex* book (1992).

I recall the Lord Chamberlain regretted he could not ban a 1957 production of *Lysistrata* (the sex-strike play, starring Joan Greenwood – a party of us went down from Nottingham to see it) because his remit did not extend to plays written before his office was created. Nowadays, the frequent and brutal homophobic jokes would get Aristophanes into serious trouble in the usual quarters.

Alcibiades drowned Eupolis for the caricature of him in *The Dyers* – surely an extreme review.

Around this time Protagoras, most famous for his 'Man is the Measure of All Things', was prosecuted for saying in his book *On The Gods* that because of the subject's obscurity and life's brevity he couldn't tell whether they existed or not – the first Agnostic. The book was ordered to be burned, but it seems enough copies survived for later writers to discuss and quote from it.

Plato in his *Republic* advocated banning Homer, Hesiod, and other classics from his ideal society in favour of uplifting songs, perhaps along the lines of that great hit from Mao's China, 'We are all good co-operative tractor drivers'. Plato was enlarging on the remark by pre-Socratic Xenophanes that Homer and Hesiod had attributed "many bad things to the gods". He elsewhere wanted to ban the books of the atomist Democritus, whose theories inspired Karl Marx's doctoral thesis. Classic condemnation remains Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945). ("…the wilder, luminous music in Plato" – Fort, *Books*, p315)

First intimations of Roman censorship begin with Augustus, a notoriously thin-skinned person when criticised – unlikely contrast is Nero's casual shrugging-off of insults (Suetonius) – and increasingly concerned with matters of public 'morality'. This last provoked his exiling of love poet Ovid and banning of his *Art of Love* from Rome's public libraries, albeit not consigned to the flames. The city was buzzing with political pamphleteers (early Twitter-storms) and politically provocative historians and orators.

LEFT: The Great Library of Alexandria on fire in a 19th century engraving.

Two such were Titus Labienus and Cassius Severus. The former committed suicide after his books were condemned, being regarded as 'The First Martyr'. Cassius's lampoons and fiery orations earned him banning and exile. In these and other cases, Augustus passed the buck, having the sentences passed by decrees of a compliant Senate.

Cassius proclaimed, "If they want to destroy Labienus's books, they must burn me alive, for I have learned them by heart" – cf. the final scene of *Fahrenheit 451*. In fact, some copies did survive, indeed (says educator Quintilian) becoming school textbooks.

In AD 25, Tiberius had the Senate ban and burn the works of historian Cremutius Cordus because he had praised Brutus and Cassius as 'The Last of the Romans' – many centuries later, Dante would consign them as traitors to the lowest reaches of Hell. Tiberius here invented the previous unheard-of (so Tacitus) 'crime' of literary treason – very *1984*-ish.

Cremutius starved himself to death, quite a common mode of ancient suicide. Surprisingly, Caligula of all people (Suetonius, *Life* ch16 para1) lifted the bans on all three, saying records of everything must be bequeathed to posterity – 'What has Posterity ever done for me?', attributed to Groucho Marx, actually going back to Addison and Steele's *Spectator* (1714).

In 62, Fabricius Veiento was condemned and exiled for his *Codicils*, lampoons against priests and senators – you'd have thought Nero, who himself penned one against a Claudius Pollio titled *The One-Eyed Man*, would have enjoyed these. They were ordered to be burned, the ban lifted when Veiento came back and rose to be three times a consul under a string of post-Neronian emperors.

Tacitus (*Annals*, bk14 ch50) is an object lesson to all censors: "As long as Veiento's books were banned, they were avidly sought-after; when freely available, they were quickly forgotten."

To be balanced, I suppose, by Caliph Omar's reason for destroying the Library of Alexandria: "If the books agree with the Quran, we don't need them. If they don't, destroy them." – should add this entire episode has been much doubted since Gibbon.

Christian Rome and Byzantium carried on the book-banning-burning tradition. Amongst the victims were hostile pagan treatises by Celsus, Porphyry, and emperor Julian. The rabid pagan historian Eunapius had to withdraw and re-issue his *Historical Chronicle* under the title *New History* after expurgating his nastiest anti-Christian remarks.

It would be pointlessly tedious to catalogue the numerous Byzantine cases. Although there must have been some personal and political factors, the essence was suppression of 'heretical' works. 'Obscenity' was not the target. Byzantines continued to read and edit Aristophanes without bowdlerisation. Patriarch Photius in the 279 book reviews that make up his *Library* frequently condemns 'obscene' passages but never argues for their destruction.

Culmination of sorts came with the Catholic *Index of Forbidden Books* (1559, revised 1948, abolished 1966).

There are online lists of authors/titles. A notable classical victim was the Greek satirist Lucian for his occasional gibes against Christianity, said by the Byzantine Dictionary-Lexicon *Suda* to have been eaten alive by dogs for his sins, absurdly vilified as 'Satan's henchman'.

Another illustrious victim was Edward Gibbon, for his anti-Christian chapters in *Decline… Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis* (Times change and we change with them). I remember when a Loughborough College lecturer (1960-2) having a student who had to get a priestly dispensation to read Gibbon for an essay.

"Books have their own destinies" – Roman grammarian Terentianus Maurus

"By the damned, I mean the excluded" – Fort, *Books*, p3

For more on book-burning, see Classical Corner 249, **FT394:16**.

The science of ghosts

DAVID HAMBLING looks at the relationship between ghost hunting and scientfic investigation

Ghosts are having a moment. Having been usurped by more modern phenomena like UFOs and alien abductions, they are back in the ascendant with ghost hunting reality TV shows, podcasts and YouTube channels vying for our attention. A recent survey suggests 34 per cent of British people believe in ghosts. Many ghosthunters now use scientific instruments rather than a psychic to guide them. So where does the science come in?

In the wake of Spiritualism in the late 19th century, ghosts and spirits received a great deal of serious scientific attention. Figures as illustrious as electrical pioneer Michael Faraday helped investigate phenomena which were described in the same terms of invisible waves and vibrations as electromagnetism and thought by some to be related. But no ghosts were detected, and the mediums who claimed to manifest them – by rapping on tables, writing on slates, playing musical instruments or other methods – failed when observed closely. This ended the great era of scientific ghost investigation.

Modern ghost hunters use instruments borrowed from other disciplines, including handheld weather meters like the Kestrel 3500NV, which measures temperature, pressure, relative humidity and windspeed. It even has a backlight to preserve the user's night vision. Sudden changes in temperature are associated with ghosts, and the weather meter is a handy way of showing something objective is occurring. There might, of course, be non-psychic explanations.

Other popular tools are the Electromagnetic Field (EMF) meter and its cousin the Gauss magnetometer. Harking back to Faraday, these are normally used to monitor electrical wiring and power lines and measure changes in electromagnetic fields. A sudden spike in EMF may be considered the sign of a paranormal presence, though again it might have other causes. Even the all-enveloping geomagnetic field of the Earth is far from constant, and changes with seismic activity, thunderstorms and solar flares. Locally it may be affected by minerals or power lines.

Ghosts might cause EMF changes, or EMF changes might cause ghosts. In the early 2000s neuroscientist Prof Michael Persinger and colleagues at Laurentian University in Canada explored the idea that background electromagnetic fields can give rise to 'apparitional experiences'. Persinger developed a helmet to stimulate

Modern ghosthunters use handheld weather meters, EF meters and Gauss magnetometers

the wearer's frontal lobes with weak EMF. Some wearers reported sensing a presence which they identified as an angel or other spirit being. However, replication of these 'god helmet' effects has been difficult, and Persinger died in 2018 (see **FT42:50-54, 201:39, 205:4; 270:55, 286:44, 450:45**).

Persinger's theory might help explain why most ghosts are associated with a specific place. To 'haunt' is literally to frequent a specific location and has been a feature of ghosts since before Hamlet's father appeared consistently on the same battlements each night.

A second theory about hauntings relates to infrasound. Vic Tandy, an IT lecturer at Coventry University, was working in a research laboratory in the 1980s which seemed to be haunted by an unseen presence. Workers reported a sense of unease, and Tandy kept seeing a grey figure in his peripheral vision which vanished when he looked directly at it. Further investigation revealed that the laboratory was suffused in 19 Hz infrasound from a faulty ventilation fan. The sound was too low pitched to hear, but caused eyeballs to vibrate, resulting in the blurs which Tandy has interpreted as a human form. Infrasound may also produce feelings of discomfort and anxiety. Repairing the fan dispelled the ghost. Tandy went on to measure infrasound at haunted locations and found that some had markedly higher levels than usual, sometimes 100 times stronger, from traffic, subways, heavy machinery or other sources (see **FT301:52**).

Dr Shane Rogers, an environmental engineering professor at New York's Clarkson University, came up with a third theory. Rogers noticed mould in many of the haunted houses featured on television. Stachybotrys or black mould can cause increased anxiety, depression and cognitive problems; research with mice showed that when exposed to spores they were more likely to show a fear reaction. Rogers took samples from 27 locations, 13 of which were considered to be haunted, and found a close correlation between fungal and ghost activity. No haunting has been conclusively linked to mould (or end by its removal), but it should be testable (see **FT329:16-18**).

The most important scientific research on ghosts comes from psychology and the observation that many people have hallucinatory experience of a deceased spouse, known as 'post-bereavement apparitions', 'hallucinations of widowhood' or 'post-bereavement hallucinations'. A 1985 survey at nursing homes in North Carolina found the incidence was as high as 61 per cent. Most of the people surveyed had never mentioned them to anyone before, and in the vast majority of cases the hallucinations were comforting and welcome. While there is still some debate over whether such hallucinations should be considered pathological in individuals with no other mental health issues, they are generally viewed positively. "These hallucinations are considered to be normal and helpful accompaniments of widowhood," notes a 1971 paper in the *British Medical Journal*.

The comforting sense of the presence of a departed spouse sitting in their favourite armchair, sensed only by the bereaved, is not what the ghosthunters are after. These ghosts lack televisual appeal with no potential for jump scares. Such apparitions do, however, fit the traditional pattern of the deceased repeating their usual activities in the same places. That they are experienced by so many people may help explain why ghost beliefs are so universal.

As with UFOs, ghost sightings may have a multitude of different causes. Many may have more to do with folklore and the durability of a good story than any actual encounter (see **FT450:30-41**), and they certainly have an enduring appeal. However, for now, 'scientific' ghost hunting is still in the realms of pseudoscience. The instruments brandished by ghosthunters may look good to TV viewers, but the scientific establishment is still waiting for real evidence of ghosts.

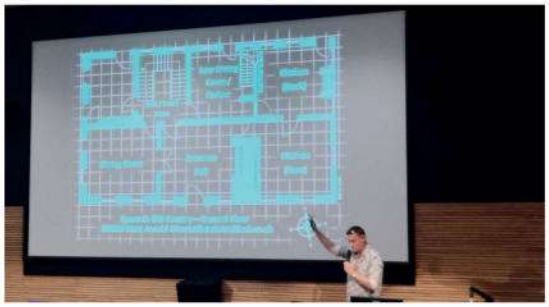
SERIOUSLY STRANGE 2024

NEIL NIXON enjoys the ghostly wonders of Winchester and a weekend of splendid talks

After two years ensconced in the splendours of Bath, ASSAP (Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena) decamped to the University of Winchester for its annual festival of presentations on all manner of strangeness.

Two days of intense activity in a lecture theatre and merch room were preceded by a lengthy and powerfully performed Friday night ghost walk. The spirits of – among others – dead French aristocrats and a local woman, buried alive and apparently haunting the centre of the city, were conjured by a pair of presenters in period costume who combined vivid storytelling with the time-honoured trick of literally jumping out on their guests. The effects of a few pre-tour drinks quickly dissipated, but no ghosts were spotted. The conclusion of the trail meant the shortest route back to camp was through an old cemetery, many fearless delegates opted to risk it; they were all visible when the presentations kicked off on Saturday morning.

I'll skip the shameless self-interest and merely note that my own "Today Winchester, Tomorrow the Cosmos" kicked it all off. You'll have to ask others whether the subsequent applause was gratitude that I'd finished on time and thrown in a few decent jokes or genuine appreciation of the content. Kristian Lander's "The Secret of the Nightcrawlers" was a brief chat and an impressive investigative film, including his own recreation, suggesting how the famous and much-viewed videos may have been hoaxed. As he accurately stated "We're watching live folklore." Ann Winsper's contribution was literally her own pet subject as she speculated on how the sensitivities of animals (cats and dogs), might contribute to detections and reports of ghostly phenomena. Folklore comes no more vivid and memorable than the Croglin Vampire legend and Deborah Hyde's evocation of the story started a crowd-pleasing trio of presentations that included John Fraser's



PHOTOS: NEIL NIXON / KRISTIAN LANDER

ABOVE: A Friday night ghost walk, the legendary Lionel Fanthorpe and a reinvestigation of the Epworth haunting were some of the highlights of this years ASSAP conference in Winchester.

Patti Keane's art included a self-portrait with a poltergeist

self-deprecating account of his first ghost hunt and Kate Cherrell's deep dive into celebrity séance territory complete with a few show stopping asides, at one point describing the infamous *Spirit of Diana* documentary (see **FT450:48-49**) as "a veritable car crash of a production".

A lengthy panel discussion opened the Saturday afternoon before Chris French explored "The Psychology of Coincidences" and Matt Arnold handed out Cluedo-style maps to aid understanding of his discussion of "The Epworth Haunting Revisited", his own investigation of a classic English case that evolved out of a lockdown project a few years ago.

Sunday's sessions opened with Mark Newbrook, accurately outing himself as "the only sceptical linguist in Europe" and going on to point out he may represent around 10 per cent, or more, of all such individuals on the planet. His talk on "Scientific Linguistics and Amateur Claims and Theories About Language" was so well received that he was still being nabbed for discussions hours after leaving the stage. Lionel Fanthorpe's presentation of favourite paranormal investigations was the most convivial session of the weekend, very much a meeting of audience and living legend in mutual admiration. Fortunately, the detailed work of Karin Beasant in presenting historical information on Jamaica Inn and Sarah Pilkington's by turns gruesome and mystifying exploration of the mass deaths in the Dyatalov Pass Incident were strong enough to follow Fanthorpe.

Paul Rodgers's lengthy presentation of evidence relating to the Dodleston Poltergeist case put much of the material in the recently re-published *Vertical Plane* book in front of the live audience. An insightful and enlightening exploration of other possibilities regarding survival of death made up Robert Radakovic's impressively accessible talk on "Transhumanism – An End to Death or Spiritual Enlightenment?" Patti Keane has already starred in *Uncanny* but her personal account of a lengthy period on the receiving end of strange and scary phenomena – "Portrait of a Poltergeist" – brought a personal touch, with many shots taken from her own writings and artwork, the latter including her own self-portrait with a poltergeist – not a common subject in painting! An up-to-date and comprehensive review of the UFO scene in the UK, presented by Michaela Ford of the UFO Identified group, brought the proceedings to a close.

Away from the auditorium a lot of lively discussions involved plans for people to work together, so it's quite possible that the results of investigations and collaborations agreed in Winchester may appear in future issues of *Fortean Times*.

Another subject discussed informally over the weekend was the fortunes of ASSAP, the 43-year-old organisation currently finding itself mired in a meltdown as far as executive resignations and other administrative crises are concerned. There was no discussion from the stage regarding new elections or future organisational plans; tentatively, there are stated intentions for a Seriously Strange Weekend 2025 somewhere in the Midlands. Again, anyone interested in spending a weekend in the company of some of the most knowledgeable and entertaining experts on all things fortean might want to watch this space.

The ghost rider of Newmarket

ALAN MURDIE explores the spectral lore surrounding champion jockey Fred Archer

The saying 'a legend never dies' has proven true with Fred Archer, the champion jockey of the Victorian era. Though his earthly life ended before he reached 30, Archer's story has imprinted itself indelibly upon the racing fraternity in Newmarket in Suffolk. Recent tributes and commemorations have included a 2020 film *Fred Archer: A Tragic Hero* and in 2023 one of the fastest racehorses of the season was named 'The Tin Man', inspired by a nickname given to Archer in life. The horse is owned by the Fred Archer Syndicate, initiated by James Fanshawe, the owner of Pegasus Stables, established on the site of Archer's former home in the town.

In September 2024 a new 'Fred Archer Tour' commenced in Newmarket and was joined by Diana Reynolds, the jockey's great-granddaughter, and author of the book *Just One More Smile: Fred and Helen Archer's Tragic Love Story* (2016). In the prologue she describes how her inspiration for writing it came from a dream of Archer she experienced when employed in an old house as a carer, declaring: "I do believe that Great Grandpa was in the room, I could see him as clear as myself in a mirror, so that day I got pad and pencil and on my break sat in my room overlooking the trees laden with snow and started to write".

This makes a fitting introduction to the equally enduring stories of the celebrated jockey coming back as a ghost, told around Newmarket for many years and mentioned in numerous ghostly gazetteers.

Born in Cheltenham in 1857, Fred Archer arrived at Newmarket in 1868 as an 11-year-old apprentice to trainer Matthew Dawson, based at Heath House. During a short and intense career, Archer rode 2,748 winners from 8,004 mounts and won the Epsom Derby five times. At the height of his fame he was feted by royalty and the aristocracy, and honoured in portraits and souvenirs. His success enabled him to acquire a substantial fortune and buy a large house, which he named Falmouth Lodge, in the town.

Such success was accompanied by a terrible personal price. To maintain this peak performance, Archer wracked his body with long sessions in a sweat box and subsisted on a starvation diet necessary for keeping his weight low. He breakfasted on half an orange washed down with one spoonful of hot castor oil. For lunch he ate one sardine with a glass of champagne, as well as taking 'Archer's Mix', a special purgative. Having gulped this down, he saddled up and rode obsessively, earning a reputation for ruthlessly driving his mounts with his spurs and whip.

ABOVE: Fred Archer photographed after his 1885 Derby win.

By his late twenties his body came to resemble the cadaverous look of an acute anorexic, a set of walking bones. His gaunt and skeletal frame was portrayed as increasingly shrivelled in cartoons and caricatures, his shoulders hunched and head stooped, like a man of advancing years.

He married Helen Rose Dawson, the daughter of his trainer, in 1883, but their union was short and tragic. Their first son died at birth in January 1884 and just 10 months later on 6 November that year, Helen herself died soon after giving birth

to a daughter. This shattered Archer, who reacted to his grief by driving himself to even greater feats of mortification, achieving the apogee of his sporting career, culminating with 246 major wins during the 1885 season. It mattered not, for from early 1886 his life was spiralling out of control, amid rumours of gambling losses and race fixing. In the October 1886, despite feeling unwell, he entered the Cambridgeshire handicap, one contest in which he had yet to triumph. He raced, but lost by a head. Soon afterwards, in November 1886, he contracted typhus.

Laying in a wasted and feverish condition in the same bedroom at Falmouth Lodge where his wife and son died, his darkening mood descended into delirium. Repeatedly, over four days, Archer pronounced his certainty that his own life was ending and he was entering his death throes; at other times his mind wandered, and he demanded doses of his 'Archer's Mix'. Then, on the afternoon of 8 November 1886, almost two years to the day that his Helen Rose had expired in his arms, and with his doctors and nurses out of the room, Archer fulfilled his own prophecy. Taking up a revolver kept by his bedside for self-defence he shot himself through the mouth. He died instantly, the bullet severing two of his neck vertebræ.

At the inquest, the coroner's jury returned a verdict of suicide whilst of unsound mind. What was displayed as the gun used by Archer in his final act was preserved for many years at the National Museum of Horse Racing in Newmarket. However, according to *The Life of Fred Archer* (1923) by Mary Edith, his close friend Captain Bowling, who identified his body, and Mr W Manning, the Clerk of Scales, buried the real gun on Newmarket Heath to avoid "it being exhibited to a morbid-loving public".

Meanwhile, the champion rider joined his wife and son in a grave at Newmarket cemetery under a florid stone, following a grand funeral and prolonged national mourning. Because of the racing records he set, Archer memorabilia continued to be manufactured for many years afterwards.

As often occurs with the death of popular heroes, tales tinged with supernatural agency soon spread, including that Archer did not rest in peace. In the mediæval period, dying by his own hand would have ensured his return as a penitent ghost seeking prayers and forgiveness. To the Tudors and Elizabethans his tragic life might have triggered conjectures about the fickleness

LEFT: Archer's "gaunt and skeletal frame" as seen in a *Vanity Fair* cartoon of 1881.

As often occurs with the death of popular heroes, tales tinged with supernatural agency soon spread

of fate and the nature of evil; and by Puritans it might have been interpreted as an example of the providential punishment awaiting those immersed in morally repellent pastimes like racing and gambling. But by the end of the doubting and materialistic Victorian age, any post-mortem appearance constituted a sufficient message and reassurance in itself. The most widely circulated story averred two acquaintances, Captain James Machell, a manager and stable owner, and Lord Derrick Rossmore of Monaghan, a onetime sponsor, were both visited by him.

Captain Machell knew Archer well but was on bad terms with him by the time of his death. Archer erroneously believed Machell 'shopped him' by reporting suspicions over racing irregularities when riding a certain horse. A few nights after Archer's death, Machell was "lying awake, quite awake, quite unable to drop off" when the jockey appeared by the bedside. The form did not speak but reached down with his hand and patted Machell on the shoulder. Machell stated: "Strange to say the action so soothed me that I went straight to sleep and slept soundly."

A few days later, Machell was staying with Lord Rossmore who underwent a similar experience. As with Machell, Rossmore too was in bed when Archer appeared. "Why Fred, what is it you want?" he asked, to which Archer replied: "I have come back to meet somebody I can trust. I know all the unkind things that have been said about me and how I was supposed to have committed suicide rather than face an enquiry by the Stewards of the Jockey Club. I swear to you I was right bang off my head when I shot myself. Will you please tell all my friends what I said to you?".

Lord Rossmore promised to fulfil this posthumous plea and Archer vanished. Immediately Rossmore got up and went and spoke with Machell who replied: "What an amazing thing. You know how upset I was about poor Archer's death," and then proceeded to tell him of his own recent experience.

This has the hallmarks of an urban legend, but Lord Rossmore vouches for both stories in his memoir *Things I Can Tell* (1912). Though calling his own experience an "odd dream" Rossmore confirms Machell – whom he calls "the most astute man of his day on the turf" – spoke of seeing Archer after death and was convinced he was fully awake at the time.

Thereafter, Archer reputedly returned to haunt sites around Newmarket. In March 1927, a Mrs Elise Jarrett, who had seen Archer race some 40 years earlier, went out walking with Mary, her teenage daughter, one Saturday morning near Hamilton Stud. Mrs Jarrett saw Fred Archer astride a grey horse silently riding out from a plantation of trees and then galloping silently towards them. Just as horse and rider came close, they faded into nothingness. Mrs Jarrett maintained she identified Archer from memory. Mary confirmed the story, saying she also recognised Archer (presumably from pictures).

These two accounts soon evolved into claims that Fred Archer was riding around Warren Hill and Rowley Mile, "on misty pre-dawn mornings". By 1936 it was a modern tradition that Archer galloped nightly over the beautiful Newmarket Heath, as noted by John Saltmarsh, organiser of the Eastern Counties Folklore Association, based at Cambridge University. Some even professed to identify his horse as 'Scotch

ABOVE: A print of Archibald Tilt's 1887 painting of a ghostly Archer, bearing the lines: "Across the heath, along the course / 'Tis said that now on phantom horse / The greatest jockey of our days / Rides nightly in the moonlight rays"

Pearl', Archer's favourite grey hack or exercise steed. The image of Archer on a light grey or white horse perhaps derive from a painting by Archibald Tilt from 1887, depicting his ghost riding across Newmarket Heath on a pale steed.

During World War II, army personnel quartered at Falmouth House allegedly encountered Archer walking the house and stables area, but few details were ever revealed.

In 1950, stories circulated that the racecourse itself was haunted with a ghostly presence blamed for the unexpected falls of certain horses and other mishaps. Horses are considered psychically sensitive and credited with an ability to see phantoms, but obviously when a horse simply freezes or panics it is not possible to ultimately determine what it sees, if anything. Such claims may have been boosted by reports of medium Ena Twigg making contact with Archer at a séance held at Hebden Bridge Spiritualist Church in July 1950.

Rumours have continued. Interviewed in 2001 for the *Observer*, Sir Mark Prescott, the longest-serving trainer at Newmarket, cited the belief both Archer and his mentor Matthew Dawson return to Heath House, but saying: "… it is a great disappointment to me that I've never met them."

The following year, *The Sports Argus* reported, "Down the years more than one stable lad has reported seeing the ghost of the five-time Derby-winning jockey," but no details were given.

Demolition removed all of Archer's home at Falmouth Lodge during the 1960s, save for its stable blocks. These were transformed and renamed as Pegasus Stables (old legends blending with new ones) after trainer James Fanshawe acquired them in 1988. Interviewed in 2011, Fanshawe also confessed to disappointment in never seeing Archer. But he did recall a séance when some stable lads tried to contact the jockey via a Ouija board. This took place on the eve of a major race in Nottingham in which his best two-year-old, 'Unblest', was running. "They called Fred up. Apparently, he told them Unblest would win – which it did the next day with 7-4 odds. But that wasn't all".

According to Fanshawe the board also supplied details of where Archer lay buried (a fact he did not think they knew, at least consciously) and issued various personal predictions, including that the girlfriend of one would become pregnant. However, perhaps for reasons of confidentiality and propriety, Fanshawe declared he did not know if this prediction was fulfilled.

As always, great caution is needed with any Ouija board communications. Here, the content and flavour of the messages are more suggestive of concerns of this world rather than the next, one might think.

Ranging further afield, I wonder if Fred Archer may be the anonymous phantom rider said to gallop around Epsom racecourse each year on the eve of the Derby (*Epsom & Ewell Advertiser*, 12 Oct 1972), but I fear this is but a whimsical tradition. Thus, so far as any verdict on Archer's ghost can be reached, it must be "Everyone knows about him, but no one has seen him".

Sources: *East Anglian Daily Times*, 12 Mar 1927; P*sychic News*, 7 Mar 1936 +1 Jul 1950 + 28 Nov 1959; *Sunday Graphic*, 22 Nov 1959. *The Gazetteer of British Ghosts* (1971) by Peter Underwood; *Observer*, 7 Oct 2001; *The Sports*, 5 Oct 2002; 'Spirit of Fred Archer Lives On' *Racing TV*, 5 Dec 2023, *Suffolk News*, 5 Aug 2024.

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

In the wake of Hurrican Helene, tensions between the citizens of a devastated North Carolina and a Government agency are creating dark conspiracy theories says **NOEL ROONEY**

HILLBILLY ELEGY

Nature (perhaps this is a memo to the wise) is not much concerned with theories. It is equally unconcerned with human affairs; a 'natural disaster' is a prime exemplar of this neutrality, and our pathetic inability to grasp the fact. When Hurricane Helene made landfall on the south-eastern coast of the US in late September, theory predicted that the storm would weaken and dissipate as it passed further inland. It did the opposite.

High winds and rain of biblical dimensions hit the western sector of North Carolina particularly hard. The landscape is low mountains and riverine valleys; a perfect vehicle for a perfect storm. This is the land of traditional hillbilly culture: Christian, patriotic, self-sufficient (of necessity) and, germane to our story, likely to vote for Donald Trump.

What happened next is no reflection on nature. In the immediate aftermath, local, autonomous rescue teams got to work; where Katrina engendered the Cajun Navy, here the Hillbilly Airforce got to work. Helicopters and all-terrain trucks began ferrying supplies to the worst-hit areas, and ferrying the injured (and, sadly, the dead) to hospitals and makeshift morgues. The official response was, according to thousands of local reports, invisible.

When FEMA did eventually turn up, they appeared to interfere with local efforts rather than help or work alongside them. There are numerous reports of people being stopped from carrying supplies or rescuing trapped survivors; some helicopter pilots were threatened with arrest for flying in US airspace without FAA permission. In many respects, this is a sadly common phenomenon; admin, bureaucracy and human faults

Bodies are still hanging from trees, floating in mud rivers...

stifle practical help, particularly the autonomous variety, after major disasters.

The stories coming out of the area, however, paint a rather darker picture. One incident, and the videos of it, has become an icon of the rift between the hillbillies and the Feds; a FEMA helicopter, hovering about 40 feet (12m) above a local supply/rescue station, mostly tables and simple tents. The copter stays in position for some while; below it, tents blow away, supplies slide off tables and float around; people struggle to maintain order in the chaos. When the area below is totally wrecked, the helicopter flies off.

Perhaps this very public insouciance on the part of the Government helped to kick off the conspiracy theories; or the very real sense among a large number of people, in dire straits, that they have been abandoned. Perhaps it was the claim that a C-17 transporter plane was loaded with relief supplies so Kamala Harris could have a photo-shoot opportunity; after the shoot, the plane was unloaded again – the supplies went nowhere. Whatever the proximate trigger, it's probably fair to say a sense of grievance fuelled the trend.

The first theories concerned the path and strength of the storm. Hurricanes lose power as they travel inland, except for Helene. Did the Government or military employ HAARP to tune the storm? Did the numerous claims by Government and military that they have the means to control or redirect weather systems represent an admission that they actively do so? Was Helene in effect an experiment, with the hillbillies playing the role of rats?

An objective observer would surely ask why any government would do such a thing. The conspiracist answers are many and varied. First, it's to scupper the Republican vote. A post from a well-known Democrat insider added some fuel to that fire. David Axelrod wrote: "Affected Democrats from Asheville are upscale liberal voters, and they're probably going to figure out a way to vote. I'm not sure a bunch of these folks who had their homes and lives destroyed elsewhere, in Western NC, in the mountains there, are going to be as easy to wrangle for the Trump campaign."

From a certain viewpoint, that is tantamount to gloating. And for the patriots, it's yet another example of white folks being ignored, downtrodden, because they are white and Christian and yes, they vote for Trump. More generally it speaks to the Great Replacement, or to the brutal engineering of depopulation. That is to say, there are plenty of reasons why TPTB would like to get rid of the hillbillies.

The rabbit hole goes much deeper. The casualty estimates, a week after the storm, are tentative, as they usually are. But reports from citizen journalists in small isolated communities speak of buildings turned into makeshift morgues, full of unidentified bodies. Bodies are still hanging from trees, floating in mud rivers, buried under debris; rigidity and incompetence are not sufficient reason, for some observers, for this state of affairs. The undercount is deliberate and will stay that way until after the election.

Mere election interference, while it turns disaster into potential murder in this rendition, is not the only reason conspiracists insist on malfeasance. The election is going to be stolen whatever happens, by one side or the other, they claim. The real story is under the saturated ground of NC, where the richest lithium deposits in the US lie, and where high purity quartz is mined for the semi-conductor industry.

Locals did not want the lithium mined, for environmental reasons. Those locals are now powerless to stop the mining companies moving in; it is, in one poster's words, a "DOD land grab". The quartz mines are currently inoperable and may remain so for some while; this strikes some as an opportunity to blackmail an entire industry. What links these situations in the C-sphere is the Big Brother/Great Reset reliance on digital surveillance technology and the evil of AI.

Competing theories, one might say, equally undermined by a storm that refused to obey our rules; disaster equity usurping disaster relief. And thousands of victims, lost, invisible, beyond the reach of any relieving theory.

https://americanmilitarynews.com/2024/10/video-c-17-loaded-with-hurricane-relief-supplies-just-for-kamala-harris-photo-op-report/ ; https://newswithviews.com/axelrod-admits-no-help-coming-to-republican-voters-in-nc/ ; www.conspiracy.news/2024-10-06-nc-lithium-quartz-hurricane-helene-land-grab.html

KARL SHUKER asks if a tusked mystery has at last been solved and enjoys Bigfoot on TikTok

A DICYNODONT DEPICTION?

A farm named La Belle France, situated in the Karoo region of South Africa's Free State Province, has long been known for the exquisite cave paintings on the wall of a cave in its grounds – and especially for one particular painting dubbed the Horned Serpent, which bears no resemblance to any known animal alive today. Its curved, elongate, spotted body has four paddle-like limbs and a small head, but bearing a pair of very large downward-curving tusks, giving it a resemblance to the head of a walrus. But there have never been walruses in this area, ever. So unless it is simply wholly imaginary, a spirit beast, what could this depicted creature represent? Cryptozoologists have speculated whether it may have been some form of aquatic sabre-tooth tiger, an idea dating back at least as far as Bernard Heuvelmans's writings in his 1978 book *Les Derniers Dragons d'Afrique*. However, a wholly new and very convincing identity has now been proposed, in a recently published *PLOS ONE* paper authored by Dr Julien Benoit, from the Evolutionary Studies Institute and School of Geosciences, at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg.

The cave paintings were produced by the San people, formerly known as the Bushmen of the East, indigenous hunter-gatherers who no longer inhabit this particular region, but were well aware of the wildlife around them and were accomplished artists, portraying such creatures in their cave paintings. The San left this area in 1835, which therefore means that this is the latest date by which the Horned Serpent painting could have been produced by them. However, it may have been made much earlier, because the San had lived here for thousands of years, and in this very same area are countless fossils that may well provide the answer to the mystery of the Horned Serpent's zoological identity, as Benoit has proposed. The fossils are mostly of ancient reptiles known as dicynodonts, which became extinct here around 250 million years ago, during the Upper Permian Period. The principal species is *Dicynodon lacerticeps*, whose squat body and four fairly stout limbs render it relatively undistinguished in appearance – except, that is, for its single pair of very sizeable, downward-curving, tusk-like teeth.

Benoit had previously discovered that the San people inhabiting Lesotho, which neighbours South Africa's Free State, had incorporated depictions of fossil dinosaur footprints into their cave paintings there, so he has now proposed that the South African Karoo's Horned Serpent was their attempt to reconstruct, like veritable proto-palæontologists, the appearance in life of the long-extinct dicynodonts, because its tusked head does bear a distinct resemblance to fossil dicynodont skulls and teeth present in this same area. Put another way, it is certainly a most notable coincidence that a mysterious tusked beast should be depicted by indigenous artists in the same region where fossil skulls and teeth of a distinctively tusked species are commonly found. But that is not all. To quote Benoit:

"The body of the tusked animal from La Belle France [Horned Serpent], as painted by the San, is strangely flexed like a banana, a pose that is commonly encountered on fossil skeletons and is called the 'death pose' by palæontologists. Its body is also covered with spots, not unlike the mummified dicynodonts found in the area whose skin is covered with bumps."

Personally, therefore, I think it likely that the longstanding mystery concerning what the Horned Serpent cave painting represents, and whose existence was first brought to widespread attention almost a century ago, in 1930, is now finally solved.

https://theconversation.com/mysterious-south-african-cave-painting-may-have-been-inspired-by-fossils-237875, 19 Sept 2024; https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0309908, 18 Sept 2024.

JULIEN BENOIT / PLOS ONE

ABOVE LEFT: The Horned Serpent Panel, painted by the San people in southern Africa, shows a mysterious tusked creature. **ABOVE RIGHT:** An interpretive drawing of the creature. **BELOW:** A hiker filmed Bigfoot apparently relaxing under a tree in a TikTok video that went viral.

BIGFOOT? BIG MISTAKE!

During early October 2024, a 10-second video clip went viral, because it allegedly depicted a real-life Bigfoot leaning against a tree while munching on a leafy branch, and had apparently been filmed by a terrified hiker who had unexpectedly encountered the entity during a hike through the Parallel Forest in Lawton, Oklahoma. This person (with the TikTok user name e_man580) uploaded the video onto TikTok on 1 October, where it quickly gained more than 1.2 million views, and subsequently appeared on YouTube, and in media reports worldwide. What made it so interesting was that whereas Bigfoot videos and photos are notoriously blurry, this video clip was very clear, which incited heated debates on social media as to its authenticity or otherwise.

So, was it really real? Of course not! In fact, as soon emerged, the Bigfoot was actually a man named Blake Younger inside a Bigfoot suit. Younger is an employee of Bigfoot Head Shop, and had been dressed as a Bigfoot in a promotional stunt for the Lawton-located store. And if further proof were needed, a second video clip appeared on Facebook in which the same Bigfoot was now seen emerging from the trees to perform a song and dance routine to DJ Snake's "Turn Down For What"! Just aping around, evidently...

www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13925677/hilarious-truth-big-cfoot-sighting-revealed.html, 4 Oct 2024; https://nypost.com/2024/10/03/lifestyle/bigfoot-captured-in-wild-viral-video-by-terrified-hiker-scariest-moment-of-my-life/, 3 Oct 2024.

FortеanTimes

PRESENTS

POLTERGEIST!

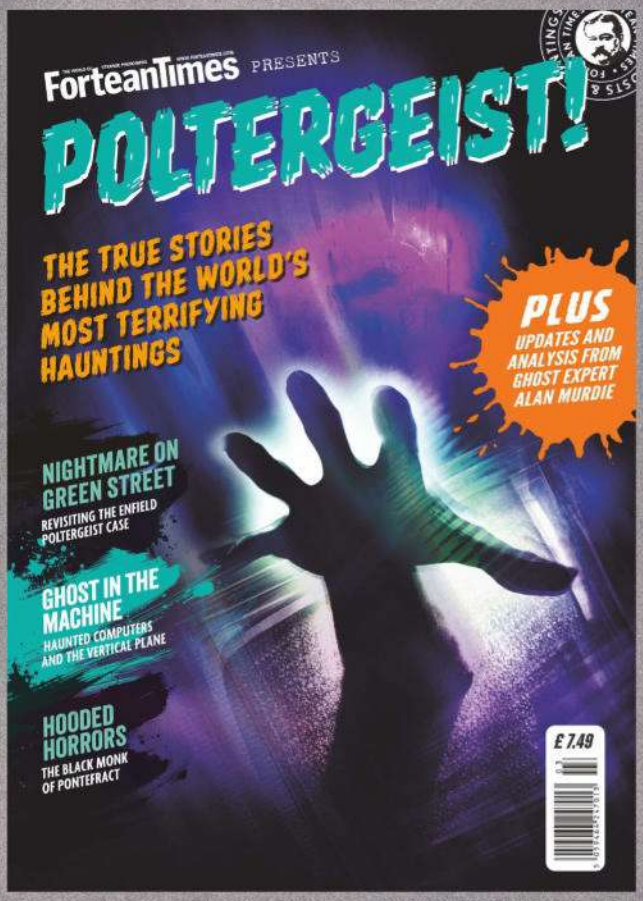
THE WORLD'S MOST TERRIFYING HAUNTINGS

From the archives of FORTEAN TIMES, the world's foremost journal of strange phenomena, comes a new collection exploring the terrifying world of poltergeists.

Providing perfect reading for Hallowe'en, this new special edition from Fortean Times brings together poltergeist cases past and present, focusing on the most terrifying, destructive and sometimes violent hauntings on record.

Join us for a detailed look at cases old and new, from the Enfield haunting - Britain's most famous poltergeist case - and the Black Monk of Pontefract - inspiration for Colin Wilson's study of the phenomenon - to lesser known outbreaks from across history and around the world.

Plus, our resident ghost expert Alan Murdie - himself an investigator of many a poltergeist case - provides updates, analysis and commentary on the articles, helping readers to delve deeper into the ongoing mystery of these 'noisy spirits.'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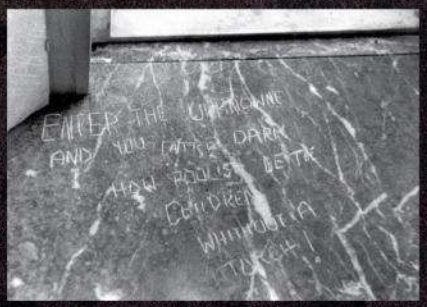

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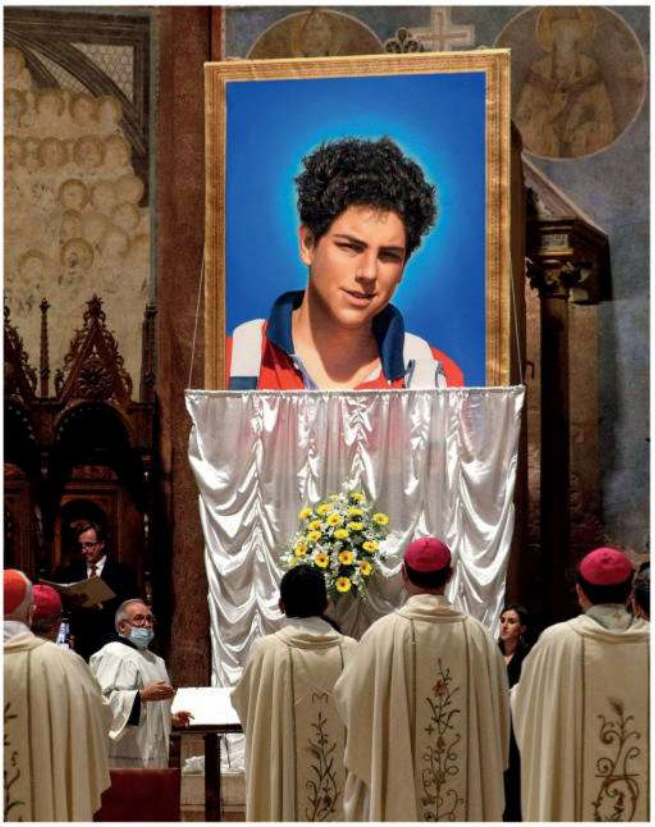
AGE OF MIRACLES | The Blessed Virgin Mary weeps and blinks, while a miracle-working teenager is set to be the first Millennial saint

DULCERIDENTEM / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

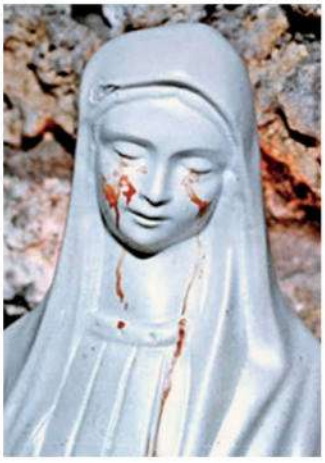
MILLENNIAL SAINT

By the time London-born teenager Carlo Acutis died of leukaemia, aged 15, in 2006, he had already attracted the attention of the Catholic Church through his proficiency in spreading their teachings online, earning him the label "God's Influencer". He was known for his piety and had designed websites for his parish and school as well as creating a popular site that aimed to document every reported Eucharistic miracle. After he died in Monza, Italy, Acutis's reputation led to his body being put on display in Assisi, along with various relics linked to him, where it immediately received devotion from the faithful. As a result, he began to attract prayers for his intercession and in 2020 it was recognised that in at least one case, this had been successful, with a Brazilian child being healed of a congenital disease affecting his pancreas after relatives prayed to Acutis. This earned him beatification, the Vatican's first step towards bestowing sainthood, but a second miracle is required for canonisation to take place. This arrived earlier this year,



ASSOCIATED PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

TOP LEFT: The body of 15-year-old Carlo Acutis on display in Assisi. **ABOVE**: An image of Carlo is unveiled during his beatification ceremony in Assisi in 2020. Hs canonisation has now been approved by the Vatican. **TOP RIGHT**: The Madonnina of Civitavecchia weeping tears of blood in 1995.



when a student in Florence had a miraculous recovery from a head injury following prayers to Acutis, leading to Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, and Pope Francis to approve his canonisation, although it is not yet known when the formal ceremony will take place. This makes Acutis the first millennial – someone born in the early 1980s to late 1990s – to be made a saint. There is already a statue of Acutis in Carfin Grotto, a Roman Catholic shrine in Motherwell, Scotland, and in the diocese of Birmingham the Parish of Blessed Carlo Acutis, incorporating churches in Wolverhampton and Wombourne, was established in 2020. *BBC News; vaticannews.va, 23 May 2024.*

OOZING MADONNA

In Civitavecchia, a port city close to Rome, a group of pilgrims praying at a grotto in the front garden of the Gregori family in late April claim to have seen its small, rusty, statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) sweat scented oil, which they filmed and spread on social media. The unprepossessing little statue had come from a souvenir shop at the pilgrimage site of Medjugorje in Bosnia, and, it is claimed, had oozed scented oil before, although this had gained little attention until it appeared on social media. It has still not achieved the profile that Gisella

Cardia's allegedly miraculous statue in Trevignano Romano has in recent years, although that "miracle" has been firmly condemned as fraudulent by the Vatican (see **FT432:8, 448:21, 450:27**). Intriguingly, this is not the Gregori family's first miraculous statue. In 1995, Jessica Gregori, then five, saw the family statue of the Virgin Mary, also bought in a Medjugorje souvenir shop, weep blood. It went on to be witnessed weeping blood on a further 13 occasions, earning the statue the name 'La Madonnina' and, despite doubts about the origin of the blood, a local church commission concluded that it had no explanation for what had happened. La Madonnina was moved to the nearby St Agostino church, where it remains, behind bulletproof glass in its own shrine. The family were given a replica of the statue blessed by Pope John Paul II in exchange, but it remains unclear whether this is the statue that is now doing the oozing. The Catholic Church has yet to comment on this latest alleged miracle. *theguardian.com, 8 Jun 2024.*

BLINKING BVM

In the US, it is a blinking BVM statue that is being acclaimed as a miracle. Seventy-five years ago, the International Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima was sculpted by Jose Thedim, known as "the Michelangelo of Portugal", and is claimed to be the closest likeness to the figure in the vision of the Virgin that appeared at Fatima, Portugal, in 1917. Since its creation, the statue has toured the world, visiting churches in more than 100 countries to be venerated by pilgrims. The sculpture was visiting the Basilica of St John the Baptist in Canton, Ohio, on 2 August, when, worshippers claim, the statue blinked while they were contemplating it, with some taking photos they believe show the miracle. Katie Moran, who heads the US branch of the organisation that tours the statue and whose photos were widely shared on social media, said, "I took one and thought, 'that's really nice'. I took one more to be sure and when I looked at it, the eyes were closed. I [went], 'Wow!'" Connie Liptak believes she saw the statue blink as well, saying, "I knew it was a miracle because I'd been looking at her all morning," adding that in the photos "You can really see her lashes are down." The statue's custodian, Larry Maginot, who tours with the sculpture, said that this was not the first time the Pilgrim Virgin Statue had been associated with miracles. "We know that she's wept 15 times," he said, and also claimed that the statue had healed a three-year-old boy with incurable malaria, while other worshippers claim the Virgin has regularly healed afflictions ranging from cancer to infertility. *dailymail.co.uk, 10 Aug 2024.*

TOP & CENTRE: The International Pilgrim Statue of Our Lady of Fatima gets her own seat on the plane to the US, where she was said to have been seen blinking during her stop-off in Canton, Ohio. **ABOVE:** The faithful pray over the incorrupt body of Sister Wilhelmina Lancaster in May 2023.

INCORRUPT, BUT NO SAINT

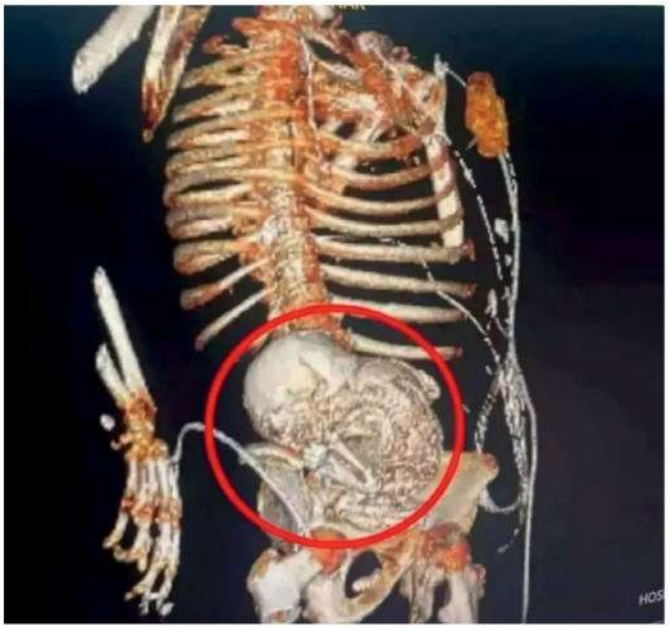
Following an investigation of the allegedly incorrupt body of the nun Sister Wilhelmina Lancaster (see **FT435:18, 44-47**), the team of medical experts noted that the condition of Sister Wilhelmina's body lacked any detected features of decomposition although the lining of her casket had completely deteriorated. They also said that "the related history of Sister Wilhelmina's death and interment does not describe conditions that would be expected to protect against decomposition," adding, "the condition of her body is highly atypical for the interval of nearly four years since her death, especially given the environmental conditions and the findings in associated objects." The authorities in the Diocese of Kansas City-St Joseph, though, have announced that while Sister Wilhelmina's body has not experienced normal decomposition, they would not be initiating a cause for sainthood for her. However, Sister Miseriacordia Radel of Sister Wilhemina's convent, the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles monastery in Gower, remained hopeful that sainthood could still be possible for Sister Wilhelmina in the future. *kctv5.com, 22 Aug 2024.*

WWW.PILGRIMVIRGINSTATUE.COM

CATHERINE MORAN / FACEBOOK

ASSOCIATED PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

MEDICAL BAG | This month's curious cases include the worm that ate Robert Kennedy Jr's brain and a woman who carried a stone baby for half a century



ABOVE: Daniela Vera and the scan revealing the lithopædion she had carried unknowingly for 56 years. **BELOW:** China's live-streamed circumcision contest.

STONE BABY

Since her first pregnancy, Daniela Vera, 81, from Brazil had complained numerous times to doctors about abdominal pain and a bulge in her belly, but to no avail. However, after several weeks of discomfort earlier this year, which was unsuccessfully treated as a bladder infection, doctors sent her for a 3D scan. This revealed that Vera was carrying a lithopædion, or stone baby, an exceedingly rare condition where a baby dies during pregnancy and is not expelled or reabsorbed by the body and instead gradually calcifies, turning to stone. Often this is because it is an ectopic pregnancy, one that starts outside the womb. In Vera's case, the pregnancy had occurred in one of her fallopian tubes, but because it had not caused acute pain or bleeding, the problem had remained unnoticed, and she had continued to carry the dead fœtus for 56 years, during which she went on to have seven healthy children. "She was old, and we are indigenous," said Vera's daughter, Rosely Almedia. "She didn't like going to the doctor – she was afraid of the equipment to take exams. She said that it looked like a baby was moving inside her belly and sometimes she felt sick, but we never suspected that it was that." Having finally identified the lithopædion, doctors carried out surgery to remove it, but Vera died the following day after suffering from an infection. *ndtv.com, 22 Mar 2024.*

CUTTING CONTEST

In China, circumcision remains a controversial operation; many people view the surgery as shameful, while others believe it enhances sexual prowess. To "correct misconceptions, promote positive attitudes, and boost levels of acceptance", urologists Guo Tao and Wang Xin organised an online professional circumcision contest, live streamed to a strictly controlled, "serious" audience, with more than 100 surgeons taking part in the three-hour event. Each doctor who participated presented a pre-recorded six-minute circumcision on video with live commentary, and judges evaluated their work based on technique, explanation, and innovation. One female viewer said: "At first, seeing so many male reproductive organs made me feel a bit curious and embarrassed, but I quickly adapted and focused on the surgeries." The winning doctor, urologist Jiang Qiqi, accompanied his circumcision with comic illustrations and was praised for his "exceptional technical expertise" and "compassionate patient care". *scmp.com, 18 Mar 2024.*

GAGE SKIDMORE / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: Robert F Kennedy Jr: "A worm got into my brain and ate a portion of it."

RING, RING

A 30-year-old Thai man was rushed to the Vajira Hospital in Bangkok after losing consciousness following his penis becoming dangerously swollen and bruised due to having been forced through 11 tight steel penis rings. In Thailand such devices are often used to treat erectile disfunction but are supposed to be worn singly and for no more than 30 minutes at a time. After attempts to reduce the swelling so the rings could be slid off failed, medics called in a rescue team, who painstakingly removed each ring with metal cutting tools before the damage to his member got any worse. Urological surgeon Wiroj Raksakun warned that penis rings should be used under medical supervision and only in concert with other erectile dysfunction treatments, adding that unlicensed doctors or clinics offering ring installations could face imprisonment of up to three years, a fine of up to 30,000 baht (£660) or both. *aseannow.com, 15 Mar 2024.*

PRESIDENTIAL MATERIAL

In a startling revelation, conspiracy-minded, vaccine-sceptical US politician Robert F Kennedy Jr admitted that he had suffered a parasitic tissue infection known as neurocysticercosis, caused by tapeworm larvæ growing in the brain. The *New York Times* found that in his 2012 divorce petition he had explained that in 2010 he had been suffering from such severe memory loss and mental fogginess that friends feared he had a brain tumour. Following brain scans, his doctors discovered, as he put it, that his problem "was caused by a worm that got into my brain and ate a portion of it and then died" and that doctors "ultimately concluded that the cyst they saw on scans contained the remains of a parasite." Kennedy said he wasn't sure how he acquired the infection, but "he suspected it might have been during a trip through South Asia." He explained that because of the damage caused by the tapeworm larvæ, "I have cognitive problems, clearly. I have short-term memory loss, and I have longer-term memory loss that affects me."

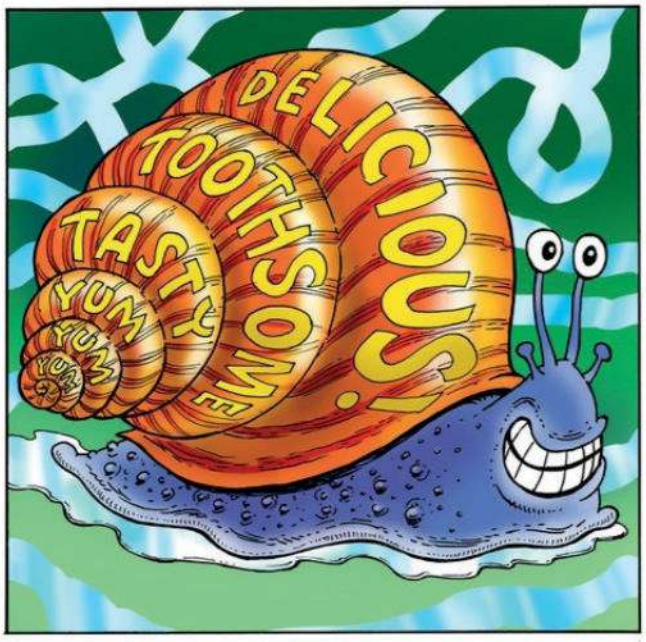
Kennedy said that around the same time he was "also diagnosed with mercury poisoning, most likely from ingesting too much fish containing the dangerous heavy metal, which can cause serious neurological issues." Apparently, this was due to his love of tuna sandwiches, which he ate all the time. The fish accumulate mercury from the environment, and eating too much tuna causes it to accumulate in the human body as well, resulting in Kennedy having blood mercury levels 10 times those deemed safe by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Kennedy, a presidential candidate when the story broke, has since dropped out of the race and endorsed Republican candidate Donald Trump, but was confident that these afflictions would not have affected his ability to act as President. *cbsnews.com/miami, 13 Mar; vanityfair.com, 8 May 2024.*

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

285: SNAILS



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

The Edible Snail is unique, in that it is edible.

The "truth"

As far as anyone knows, all British land snails are edible – though not necessarily palatable, or big enough to be worth the effort. Plenty of farmed and imported snails are eaten in UK restaurants as escargot, but there is also a folk tradition of snail-eating which goes back centuries and lingered, in places, at least into the 20th century; the "wallfish" of Somerset, for instance, and the jars of pickled snails found in north-east England. The point is that the snail usually collected for eating is the one people usually encounter: *Cornu aspersum*, the garden snail ("le petit gris" in France). *Helix pomatia* (the Roman snail or edible snail) was introduced to Britain as livestock by the Roman occupation – but so, it's thought, was the garden snail. Although Romans are prized by gourmets, in Europe they are more likely to be hunted than farmed; the garden species is the most commonly farmed in the northern hemisphere. Incidentally, the Roman is strictly protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, so keep your two-pronged fork to yourself.

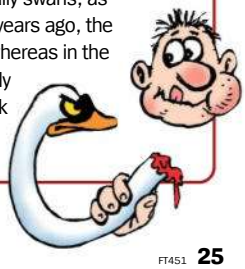
Sources British Wildlife, October 2023; www.inaturalist.org/taxa/61523-Helix-pomatia

Disclaimer

Please send corrections of fact to the letters page. But don't use snail mail in case they get eaten on the way.

Mythchaser

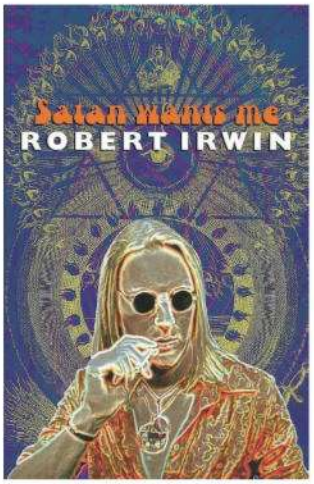
"They're eating the pets of the people," said Donald Trump during a recent presidential debate. "And it's a shame." By "they", he of course meant immigrants. On this side of the Atlantic, the imaginary meals don't usually consist of cats and dogs, but of inappropriate wildlife – especially swans, as mentioned in this column long ago (**FT181:28**). Twenty years ago, the swan-eating libel was directed at Eastern Europeans, whereas in the 19th century it was Irish labourers who were supposedly roasting the poor birds. Can anyone take this myth back even earlier, in the UK, the US, or anywhere else?



NECROLOG

This month, we say goodbye to a scholar and writer who drew on his early experiences and Arabist interests to write a series of fantastical novels

EAMONN MCCABE / POPPERFOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES



ROBERT IRWIN

Robert Irwin had two parallel careers: one as a leading scholar of the mediæval Arab world, the other as a literary novelist. They frequently intersected, and both were permeated with his distinctive taste for the fortean, the surreal and the absurd.

Irwin suffered a miserable childhood, shuttled between the grim and sadistic boarding school regime of Epsom College and Holloway Sanatorium, the mental hospital where his father was superintendent psychiatrist. In 1964 he won a scholarship to Merton College, Oxford, where he found the cloistered mediæval ambience far more congenial than the outside world.

During his first summer holiday he hitchhiked to Algeria, arrived in the middle of a military coup, and found a place of sanctuary in a zawiya, or sufi monastery, in the city of Mostaganem. He converted to Islam, was initiated as a fakir and worked in the zawiya printing their religious texts. During his residence he experienced marvels and inexplicable phenomena – clairvoyance, telepathy, objects vanishing into thin air – so frequently that he came to accept them as normal.

Tales of dervishes, djinn, hashish, treasure hunters and sorcerers

He wrote up his experiences in *Memoirs of a Dervish: Sufis, Mystics and the Sixties* (2011), and they informed both his parallel careers. His first novel, *The Arabian Nightmare* (1983) deployed the unreliable narrators and tales-within-tales of the original *Arabian Nights* to create a vividly imagined mediæval Arab world in which reality is continually flipped and undermined. His scholarly non-fiction *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, published by Penguin in 1994, sets these tales of dervishes, djinn, hashish, treasure hunters and sorcerers in a richly documented social and historical context.

On his return from Algeria, Irwin found himself adrift in swinging London. He felt alienated from the scene, an outsider looking in at the parties and beautiful people, but he explored many of the emerging seekers' paths: he took LSD while it was still legal, read RD Laing, explored Zen Buddhism and joined various spiritual groups including the Process Church (see **FT134:34-39**), to which the epithets 'cult' and 'Satanic' are frequently appended, though Irwin recalled it as enjoyably hedonistic and playful. These experiences formed the basis of his novel *Satan Wants Me* (2007), which is cast as the diary of a bored sociology student in 1967 London who decides to join an occult order as research for his dissertation, with unforeseen mind-warping consequences.

Irwin proceeded to master classical Arabic at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and from 1972 taught mediæval Islamic history at the University of St Andrews. He wrote a series of academic studies, which resisted the trend of highlighting the period's modernity and instead stressed its occult and magical dimensions, notably in his 2018 biography of the historian and Sufi mystic Ibn Khaldun.

In 1977 he switched his focus to fiction, publishing a series of novels with the independent publisher Dedalus Press, which he had helped to found. Its list of obscure decadent, gothic and surrealist fiction, often translated from little-known European authors, led some in the industry to refer to it as 'Dead Loss Press', but *The Arabian Nightmare*, one of its first titles, was translated into

20 languages and it continues to publish energetically in the genre it refers to as 'distorted reality', which he helped to shape with novels such as *The Mysteries of Algiers* (1988), a paranoid tale of civil war espionage, and *Exquisite Corpse* (1995), set in the world of the 1930s British surrealists.

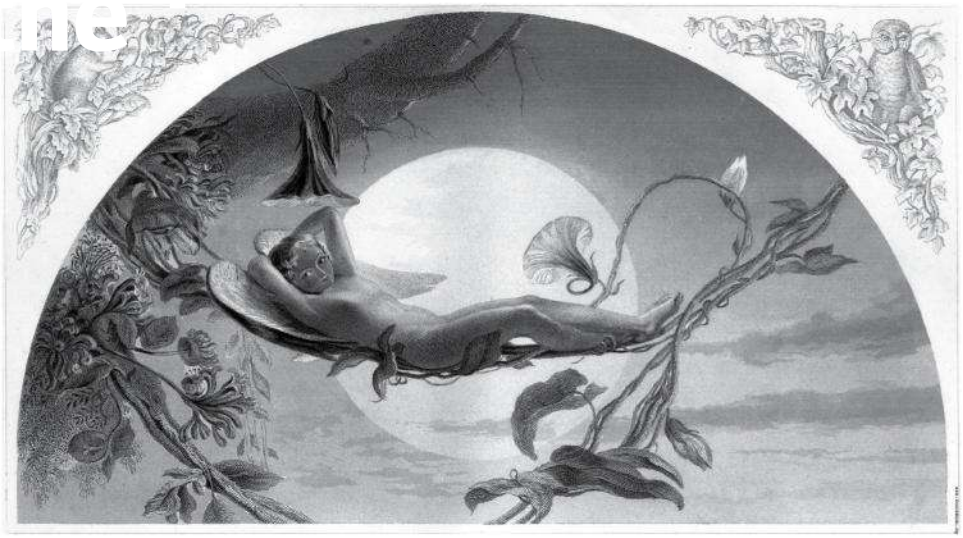
Irwin became an established figure on the London literary scene, not least as the Middle East editor for the *Times Literary Supplement*, but he maintained his links with the esoteric margins. He led study groups on hermetic texts and demonology at the Warburg Institute and was a stalwart of the London Institute of 'Pataphysics, the club founded by the French avant-gardist Alfred Jarry and defined as "the science of imaginary solutions".

Feeling that he had missed out on the joys of childhood, in middle age he took up roller-skating and became highly proficient, gliding round the streets and parks of his native south London as he pondered his novels and academic papers. He wrote: "The 13th century Arab sorcerer, Ab'l-Qasim Al-Iraqi, wrote in a grimoire of a spell to make a pair of sandals of gazelle hide and described how the ground concertinas under the feet of the possessor of such sandals, so that he may cover a month's journey in a day. Roller-skating is like that."

He was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2020 and spent his final years writing a series of novels that followed the characters from *Satan Wants Me* into the 1970s and beyond, through New Age encounter groups, postgraduate studies in gothic literature, secret societies and the Soho counterculture. New characters appear with ever more outlandish backstories which they all introduce, in the manner of *The Arabian Nights*, by declaring: "My story is a strange one".

Robert Irwin, scholar, historian and novelist, born Guildford, 23 August 1946; died London 28 June 2024, aged 77.

Mike Jay



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

COTTINGLEY CONSPIRACIES

Editing *The Cottingley Fairy Photographs: New Approaches to Fairies, Fakes and Folklore* (just out from Pwca Books, £19.99) has made me reconsider the official Cottingley narrative. I once confidently dismissed Cottingley conspiracy theories. But, working with 15 scholars from six nations on this volume has opened, for me, a door to new, troubling possibilities. In the years between 1920 and 1983 (when Frances and Elsie finally fessed up) the conspiracy was, I suppose, that the girls had faked the photographs. Once that fact was admitted, the question was how they had done it.

At this point a new conspiracy theory emerged. The photographs had not been taken by the girls, as they both claimed. Rather they had been taken by adults with experience of photography, including perhaps Elsie's father, Arthur Wright. The champion of this thesis in modern times has been Fiona Maher, not least in this magazine (**FT356:30-35**) and I'm very happy to say that Fiona is one of the authors in the new Cottingley book. I am sceptical of many of the details in Fiona's thesis, particularly the idea that the Wrights' motive was money. But going through the Cottingley sources I've begun to waiver. First, I've noted previously in this place that there are very good reasons for thinking one Cottingley photograph had been published in a local newspaper almost a year before its 'official' publication (**FT446:27**). The family seemed to be reaching out to the media in early 1920. Second, I'm also struck by the fact that in July 1920 the Wrights told Edward Gardner that there had been attempts to take other fairy photographs but that they had come out 'fogged'. We hear nothing of this anywhere else! Third, Marguerite Johnson, another contributor to the volume, has discovered that there were Edwardian camera adverts that had children photographing fairies. The idea of children being snapped with or snapping fairies had been sloshing around in Elsie's parents' generation, then. Fourth, I've now talked to several photographers and artists who make bold claims for the quality of the photographs. Remember that the first and second Cottingley photographs were the first photographs that respectively Elsie and Frances were supposed to have taken. Yet – this was a point made as long ago as 1971 in a *Nationwide* documentary – photographs one to four are masterful compositions.

> THERE WERE EDWARDIAN CAMERA ADVERTS THAT HAD CHILDREN PHOTOGRAPHING FAIRIES

None of this is proof. But some young scholar badly needs to dedicate a proper book-length, decade-long study to Cottingley, which would include combing through the documents in the Cottingley archive at Leeds. A number of us older hands might end up revising our opinion of what happened at Cottingley for the second time in a lifetime!

Magonia's end

NIGEL WATSON marks the end of an era and looks back on the history of a seminal UFO publication

John Rimmer has announced the sad news that from the end of this year he will no longer be updating the *Magonia* website. As a print publication, *Magonia* ended in April 2009 with issue number 99, and since then John has used the website to upload reviews of UFO and fortean-related books and films.
It began life way back in 1965 as the *Merseyside UFO Research Group Newsletter*, and a year later the *Newsletter* was rebranded as a *Bulletin* when John Harney took over the editorial reins. From those origins in 1968 it morphed into the *Merseyside UFO Bulletin* (*MUFOB*).

Peter Rogerson, who became a regular and important contributor to the publication, noted: "From the moment it was established by John Harney and the then science editor Alan Sharp, *MUFOB* was seen as following in the footsteps of its irreverent *MUFORG* predecessor, dousing ufological speculation with dollops of common sense. Of course soon Mr Rimmer joined the happy crew, and the first triumvirate, the Three Merseysiders Blind To Reality, if not In Black, was established."

In the 1970s, Roger Sandell joined the editorial crew, and in the same period the two Johns moved to London, and for a time *MUFOB* was clumsily titled the *Metempirical UFO Bulletin*. At Peter's suggestion it was renamed *Magonia* due to the influence of Jacques Vallee's 1969 book *Passport to Magonia* and the gathering support for the psychosocial hypothesis (PSH) that pitched itself against the dominant extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH). The first issue was published in Autumn 1979.

Peter felt that *Magonia* had its glory days in the 1980s, and its finest hour was taking a stand against the Satanic Abuse stories (along with *Fortean Times*) that were grabbing the headlines at that time. *Magonia* also carried lively discussions about the nature of alien abductions, the Earthlights phenomena, crop circles and Warminster, plus it investigated and reconsidered numerous UFO reports from a PSH viewpoint.

Magonia in all its various incarnations was a bastion of common sense constantly at war with the sensational stories of UFO contacts and abductions and the lazy idea that they are caused by aliens from outer space riding around in nuts and bolts spacecraft.

John Harney in an article "From Outer Space, or From Inner Space?", carried in the October 1967 edition of *MUFORG Bulletin*, shows an example of how advanced his and his fellow writers were in their thinking:

"When it comes to contact stories,

MAGONIA

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LO HE COMES IN CLOUDS DESCENDING

Religious and secular millenarianism By John Fletcher

mysterious telephone calls, the alleged silencing of UFO witnesses and similar phenomena, it is evident that psychology is the subject one must turn to. Unfortunately, few qualified psychologists have seen fit to devote any attention to our subject. Most of those who have looked at the subject have done so in such a superficial and perfunctory manner that their findings are easily refuted."

Peter summed-up the *Magonia* viewpoint: "Whatever the 'real' nature of these alleged phenomena and experiences, they undoubtedly exist as social phenomena, things people believe they have experienced and which they either fit into pre-existing belief systems or construct new ones. Give something a name and you summon it."

The PSH, through the pages of *Magonia*, has championed looking at the wider social context of such sightings and at the marvels of human perception and, more importantly, mis-perception. This contrasts with the current popularisation of UAPs and the idea they are operated by non-human intelligences whose "technology" operates like magic that we can barely understand.

Magonia often looked at historical "UFO" flaps and Biblical and folkloric tales of supernatural entities that have been used as evidence that "aliens" have lived alongside humanity for thousands of years. Peter emphasised that "when dealing with 'historical UFO records' … we have no real justification in assuming that the airship sightings are 'nineteenth century UFO waves', at least in the sense that they are occasioned by the same external common source." The common denominator is that they are human phenomena that are very much dependent on the social context that is so often ignored by ufologists. Flying saucers came about because of Cold War fears, while the British airship scares of 1909 and 1913 were caused by the fear of invasion by German Zeppelins.

Writers for *Magonia* were never dismissive or totally sceptical: they all just wanted to understand what was going on, and to not slavishly or mindlessly promote UFOs as spaceships or space ghosts.

Fortunately, John will continue to keep *Magonia* and its related websites going as a useful archive. The archives not only contain the main contents of all 99 editions of *Magonia*, but also *MUFORG Bulletin* numbers 1 to 11, covering 1966 to 1967, 34 editions of the *Merseyside UFO Bulletin* (*MUFOB*) dated 1968 to 1974, and 19 editions of *MUFOB New Series* covering 1975 to 1979.

On the main site there is a full selection of articles from *Magonia* relating to Warminster, and another important section that contains all of Peter Rogerson's INTCAT material, a catalogue of Type 1 UFO close encounter cases dating from 1751 to 1986. He notes:

"These stories show how UFO stories meld imperceptibly into ghost and fairy tales. They encode the mysteries of the night and wild and liminal places and show interesting constants of the imagination."

John Harney also published 62 editions of the *Magonia ETH Supplement* from March 1998 to August 2006, looking at the evidence supporting the ETH viewpoint. He made the point that: "There are probably some reports which are examples of observations of unusual atmospheric optical or electrical phenomena, but these tend to become distorted by the obsession with the ETH or even more exotic speculations instead of a desire to find the true facts of each case. This ensures that ufology will never be taken seriously by mainstream science."

The Swedish-based AFU website carries scanned pdf copies of the *Supplement* and the rest of the Magonia stable, where you can trace their evolution through their various typographical formats and styles.

pelicanist.blogspot.com/2024/09/so-long-and-thanks-for-all-books.html
files.afu.se/Downloads/?dir=Magazines%2FUnited%20Kingdom

For more on Magonia, see **FT245:55, 400:52-53, 428:28-29**.

Inner elves

JENNY RANDLES wonders if we've been looking for aliens in all the wrong places

In the middle of the 20th century, UFOs seemed to arrive out of nowhere. But that perception may be the result of a category identification error. The question we should have asked was not: *What is this new phenomenon?* Doing so led us on a chase for aliens, because humans were about to explore space and thinking about life 'out there'. So, if UFOs manifest themselves 'in tune' with society, that is surely a clue to their nature.

We misread that connection. We misunderstood it as visible proof of strange craft and weird beings. Often small in stature and wearing unusual clothing – much like characters from folklore almost everywhere. This continuity with folklore around the globe was a rather big clue that most observers sidelined too easily, because space travel was the coming thing and definitely real.

Rather less of a massage to the human ego would have been to phrase the question a little more humbly: What if we were the invaders, of a much broader realm? What if we were the inferior beings located where others beyond our ken had previously tolerated our presence, occasionally interacted with us, and may have been more afraid of our doing more harm to this planet than any alien invasion might?

The sudden arrival of fleets of UFOs occurred when we were building rockets that might one day take us to the stars. However, they also came at about the same time as another technological breakthrough. One that could actually threaten life on Earth in a way spaceships would not.

The atomic bomb was perfected just before the arrival of the saucers. The Bomb changed everything for our society. It seemed we had the ability to destroy our world and all life on it – from cats and dogs to elephants and mice. And elves, if such beings exist. Suddenly the human race had become the nemesis of the planet. So far so obvious, but what if the reaction to that nightmare came not from a planet around a distant star (as the contactees claimed)? What if *this* planet was their home?

Once you are willing to consider the idea that our domination of Earth might turn out to be in part illusion built out of arrogance, then we quickly see some rather fascinating consequences. And the mystery of UFOs or aliens starts to take on a new aspect.

It has been speculated that the Earth itself has a consciousness that supersedes our own and manifests in a way that we have not fully recognised. What if the nightmare of an alien invasion was a response to our folly from within the collective consciousness of the Earth itself?

PETER HOUGH

LEFT: Jenny Randles with Lyall Watson in Mancester in the mid-Eighties.

His books made me reimagine what might really be going on during close encounters

Perhaps the intervention was not coming from observers from another star system. That, we know, would have to be far away – at least four light years – and given the diversity of visitors reported, would involve several species at the same time. Once you contemplate the prospect of 1940s Earth becoming the equivalent of a Cosmic Ibiza attracting visitors from all over the Universe, the idea starts to seem as bizarre as your bus to work suddenly being sometimes driven by chimpanzees or dinosaurs. That the phenomenon is mostly driven by something Earth-centric, not a menagerie from outer space, seems clear. So the need to explain what happened becomes all the more necessary.

One thing about UFOs that seems apparent is that the events described – especially in close encounters and alien abductions – emerge from within our own nightmares. They are performative in nature. A drama played out in what we assume is the world around us, and in which we are just bystanders. Not scriptwriters.

The vast majority of 'aliens' also have obvious humanoid traits. Not like giant spiders or sentient delphiniums or anything *really* non-human. They match our arrogance, too, you might say, by often being smaller than humans. Yes, it is possible that the humanoid form is *de rigeur* for intelligent life and is scattered around the cosmos. But this factor in the data has long led me to suspect the alien-visitor theory is not coincidence, but consequence.

We have created them as a visionary outcome driven by an inner need. Perhaps a collective one that we have not tamed and that is built out of the psychic ether of our whole planet. I suspect it creates an extreme state of consciousness, which I call the Oz Factor, that can manifest in a visual display or drama. We are part author and part observer of the outcome, but the message is one coming from the collective consciousness of the planet's reaction to the trauma inflicted by our steady march towards destruction. Not just of us, but of *all* life on Earth. That fear may well be primal across species.

I can recall the first time I started to think on these lines. It was fairly early in my career when by chance I did a TV show in Manchester with the biologist Lyall Watson. He was a man with a deep insight into consciousness and radical ideas about nature, the mind and what seem supernatural things His books *Supernature* (1973) and *Lifetide* (1979) made me reimagine what might really be going on during close encounters and led me to come up with the term 'Oz Factor'. I began to wonder if UFOs might also be a product of the psyche of all conscious life on Earth. Perhaps it long has done this, since cultures all over the world have tales of beings that co-exist with us in magical realms. From fairies to ogres and elves to – in the part of Lancashire where I grew up – boggarts.

I noticed the similarity with aliens, who seem to resemble an updated version of the bogey man. Scary, but mitigated a little by often not being monstrous in size, just as elves and fairies are not. Wiser than us, and warning, not intervening. Triggered in times of stress, they do appear to manifest like a flashing sign inside our consciousness. Perhaps elves had to become aliens so that we took notice of them. And in order that we understand that the beings we are encountering in these extraordinary close encounters are very close to home indeed. The aliens or the elves neither need a telescope to seek us out, nor to visit from another dimension.

We might have only to look in the mirror.

WEIRD OUT WEST

THE PARANORMAL RANGERS

PETER BROUGHAN tells how he met Stanley Milford Jr and Jonathan Dover, the Paranormal Rangers, whose work investigating paranormal goings-on in the Navajo Nation is now the subject of a new book.

August 1998. After a night in the neon hell of Las Vegas I had driven across an iconic desert landscape, arriving late at the tour departure point in the heavenly setting of Monument Valley. The last Moke excursion was ready to leave with just a handful of other strangers in the three bench rows behind the driver.

I jumped in behind the young, lively and charming Navajo guide and as he drove us off into the indescribable wonders of the Valley with the sun already setting, he asked us what we all did. My fellow tourists replied in turn and then it was my go.

I hate moments like these. I am a film producer, but I am also Scottish and suffer from 'Caledonian cringe', that unshakeable working-class fear of sounding grand and pretentious. I mumbled out a reply.

"You make films?" said our man, with genuine interest. "Like documentaries?"

"Well, I've done that before, but now I try to produce cinema movies."

"Wow!" he exclaimed. "Would I know any of your films?"

There was no escape now unless I risked being unfriendly.

"I produced a film three years ago you *might* have heard of. *Rob Roy*, with Liam Neeson and Tim Roth and Jessica Lange?"

The Moke came to a shuddering stop and the guide whirled round, looking me full in the eye.

"You didn't produce that movie!"

The force of his response startled me. Did he hate the picture? Did he not believe me?

"Yes, I did. So you've heard of it?"

He nodded and paused. And then said something so sincere and unexpected I will never forget it.

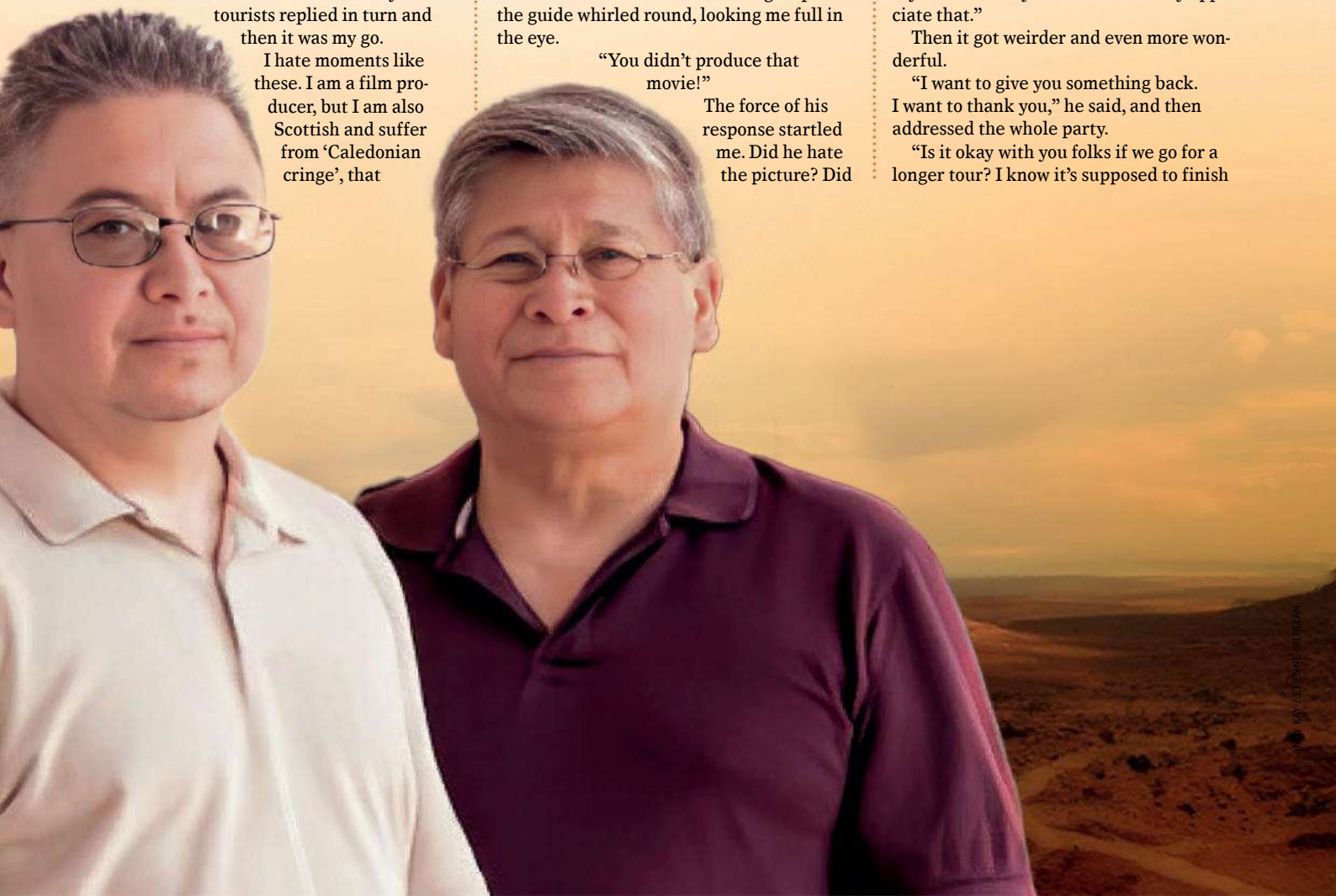
"That film means so much to me and my people. The story of your clans fighting for survival is like the story of our tribes here. It's the same story."

His words hit me like a physical blow. I tried to control the emotion that had surged up. When I managed to respond, I wanted to tell him that all of Scotland was blessed by such a profound compliment. But all I could say was "Thank you so much. I really appreciate that."

Then it got weirder and even more wonderful.

"I want to give you something back. I want to thank you," he said, and then addressed the whole party.

"Is it okay with you folks if we go for a longer tour? I know it's supposed to finish



ANDY KAY / ÉTIENNE GILFILLAN

by sunset but you will definitely like it."

And he started up the Moke again and carried us all into the most unforgettable night we are ever likely to experience. The monumental red sandstone buttes and columns appeared around us, familiar to all from the classic movies of John Ford and his successors.

It is a transcendental landscape that thrills the mind and moves the heart profoundly. The geological wonders are marked in places by ancient pictograms telling stories of the Navajo ancestors and their gods and visitors. The sun disappeared behind the rocks and night quickly arrived. Time itself felt soft and elastic. A new set of throat-catching wonders appeared above us in the crystal-clear sky of the Navajo desert.

I had never seen a sky like it. It was impossible to be in this place without being dazzlingly aware of the infinite beauty of the Universe and its countless stars and planets.

And then the paranormal intruded. Our guide slowed, peering into the starlit shadows ahead and then stopped. "I usually go down that way, but not tonight."

I asked why not, very aware of the snake tracks that were evident in the dust along the way.

"A Skinwalker was seen around this part of the valley yesterday. Best if we go back by another route." An involuntary shudder travelled up my backbone. I would learn more about this mythical phenomenon much later.

The odyssey eventually ended after a tour that took several hours longer than was planned or paid for, but no one was complaining. We could not thank our brilliant guide enough but we all tried.

I went to look for lodging at the nearby Goulding's Trading Post and luckily a sleepy concierge managed to find me a bed in a trailer. But although I was exhausted, my head was still spinning after my first encounter with the Navajo lands, legends and people.

It wasn't to be my last.

"A SKINWALKER WAS SEEN AROUND THIS PART OF THE VALLEY YESTERDAY"

MEETING THE NAVAJO RANGERS

It was 2013 before I was able to visit this amazing part of the world again. Claiming it as homework, and scouting for possible sign-ups for my own Scottish Paranormal Festival the following year (see **FT319:40-41**), I was attending the International UFO Congress. The location was a casino resort on an Indian reservation in the city of Scottsdale, near Phoenix in Arizona.

The very first presentation immediately grabbed my attention. The Navajo Rangers Jonathan Redbird Dover and Stanley Milford Jr were billed as two highly skilled Native American operatives working across the vast 27,000 square miles of the Navajo nation. Starting their talk they explained that in addition to their regular duties Jon and Stan had agreed in 2000 to take on the investigation of supernatural happenings, including UFO sightings, that seemed to occur with great regularity in this undoubtedly liminal location hanging between cultures, worlds and dimensions.

FACING PAGE: Stanley Milford Jr (left) and Jonathan Redbird Dover. **BELOW:** The transcendental landscape of Monument Valley.

Their illustrated presentation included various accounts of strange phenomena. There was the story of "The Ol' Man", a Navajo elder who did not speak any English and lived in a very remote part of the 'Res'. One night when his wife was away visiting relatives he found his cabin surrounded by what looked like aliens with torchlight devices who seemed to be searching for something. He actually got his shotgun out and fired off a few salvos to scare them away. Jon and Stan interviewed him several times, but his account, which he gave to many people over the years, never varied one iota in any detail.

Then there was the case of a young woman who was driving home late one night after work across the desert. She noticed she was being followed by an orb-like object that tracked her progress, eventually and alarmingly seeming to plunge through her car before disappearing. When she got to her home she discovered an impossible creature sitting outside – a six-foot (1.8m) tall rabbit with deep black eyes! Plucking up courage, she shot out of the car and made a dash for her door, which she locked behind her. The Rangers visited the following day and found a noticeable depression in the very solid earth where the rabbit had been sitting. They later examined the car and discovered an electromagnetic path that some object had left, which would have passed right through the girl as she was sitting in the driving seat.

PHOTOS COURTESY PTETER BROUGHAN

LEFT: The author and Stan Milford in 2013. **BELOW:** The young Navajo guide in Monument Valley who opened the door to the glories of the Navajo Nation.

On another occasion the staff of a Navajo government building had been reporting strange goings-on that seemed to suggest a poltergeist. When Stan went with two others on a weekend search of the premises a shower of US coins apported in the air above their heads and fell to the floor. Over the weekend, 66 coins appeared – and every single coin landed heads up.

I was utterly fascinated by the Rangers themselves and by their accounts. After they finished I felt compelled to go and congratulate them on a tremendous lecture. I waited until others had their turn and introduced myself. Almost without thinking I was immediately telling them of the connection I had made with the young Navajo driver in Monument Valley, and how much his statement had meant to me. I waited for their response, hoping that I had not embarrassed myself or them too much.

The guys looked at me, then each other, and then back to me. It was Jon who spoke first.

"You are now our friend," he said quite simply, and put out his hand. It was the second time I had been astounded by a Navajo statement, delivered without guile or superficiality.

And what also struck me then was a voice inside saying: *"These guys are truth-tellers. Their eyes confirm that. No matter how weird the telling I believe that everything they say is true."*

I asked them if they wanted to be addressed as Native Americans or Indians and they said they really didn't mind either way. Slightly to my surprise Jon had made a barely joking reference during their talk to the effect that although they took everyone as they found them Indians had no reason whatsoever to trust any white man unquestioningly.

When they invited me out to celebrate my birthday at a Chinese restaurant in Phoenix a couple of days later, I felt genuinely privileged to be in the generous company of these unique and impressive men.

"YOU ARE NOW OUR FRIEND," HE SAID, QUITE SIMPLY AND PUT OUT HIS HAND

SKINWALKERS AT DINNER

Anyone (but especially boys) brought up in the 1950s and early 1960s was probably obsessed with Cowboys and Indians. In the films and TV we watched and the comics we avidly read the image of the tomahawk-wielding Redskin as a feared enemy was embedded in all our young white minds before adulthood delivered a startling re-education.

The Rangers now told me of the Long Walk of the Navajo – the deportation, relocation and ethnic cleansing of the Navajo people by the US Federal Government and Army in this very area where we were now dining.

Some 53 different forced marches of 10,000 Navajo and 500 Mescalero Apache were imposed between August 1864 and the end of 1866. During the marches and internment up to 3,500 people died from starvation and disease over a four-year period. Colonial domination by figures like Kit Carson casts a long shadow into the present day of Native American culture.

These days, Navajo Rangers are trained at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center and are recognised by the Government as Federal Officers. Jon had also completed criminal investigation training at the centre.

When Stan looked back on wanting to become a Navajo Ranger, he remembered that it was an exclusive club. They had a "presence" about them, and he wanted to be a part of that. He and Jon met around 1989. They started working together, sometimes on action-filled assignments. They were co-SWAT team commanders for backcountry operations and became close friends, even adopting each other as brothers.

I asked how they first came to be the 'Paranormal Rangers' and real-life Native American *X-Files* operatives.

They recounted how in 2010 an old Indian woman had made a complaint to the Head Ranger after she had anxiously sought help because a Skinwalker had been creeping around her remote *hogan*. The young Ranger who was dispatched to interview her about this had been somewhat arrogant and dismissive about her claims, which did not please the boss.

He announced that he was determined that any concerns or reports coming from the community, no matter how strange sounding they might be, had to be investigated properly and with respect. Stan and Jon were natural candidates.

They themselves were mixed-blood Indians; both were Navajo, but Jon was half-Plains and Stan half-Cherokee. They told me that 'full blood' Navajo were extremely afraid of the paranormal and did not want to go anywhere near this stuff. Especially incidents involving Skinwalkers...

Stan and Jon explained that a Skinwalker was a human being who has attained supernatural powers, and specifically the ability to shapeshift into the form of certain animals (see **FT169:44-47,329:38-41, 363:38-41**)). The aspirant Skinwalker makes a firm decision to follow the black path of witchcraft instead of the enlightened way of other shamans and elders and gains sinister abilities by engaging in atrocious acts of witchcraft. This can even involve child abduction and murder. The Rangers reported one awful, multi-witness event when a burial party on the reservation had arranged themselves in a circle around a deceased infant. Before the poor child could be interred, a fierce sandstorm suddenly blew up out of nowhere, obscuring the view of everyone present. After a short time the wind and dust subsided. The body of the infant was nowhere to be found.

PHOTOS COURTESY STANLEY MILFORD JR

ABOVE: Stan's Ranger Patrol Unit, his transport for getting around the 27,000 square miles of the Navajo Reservation, parked near Satan Butte in Arizona, the site of a case involving UFOs and skinwalkers. **BELOW:** Stan in his Ranger uniform in 2010, alongside his sketches of a Skinwalker and a Bigfoot he witnessed himself.

Skinwalkers coat their bodies with a white dust they collect from the ashes of their victims.

Stan told of a teenage experience before he joined the service, and one which he includes in the book he later wrote. He had gone to the movies and was driving home across the desert when he glimpsed what he first thought was a horse galloping through the brush and parallel with his car. Looking more closely he realised that his night companion was actually a dusty white biped, running at terrific speed alongside him. He put his foot on the gas and accelerated, but the runner kept impossible pace with him for a good while until he accelerated even more and lost the pursuer.

UFOS AND TIMESHIFTS

Jon in particular has had numerous UFO experiences. On one occasion he was driving at night towards a rail crossing when a massive UFO appeared and hung over the tracks. To the panicked consternation of his passenger, Jon actually got out and walked over to stand right under it, fascinated.

He spoke of another time when he found mysterious marks that had appeared on his body that suggested a possible abduction, and also an apparent subcutaneous implant that had not been there previously.

Jon said that there are many cases where massive craft and even landings and occupants were seen. He instanced a mass sighting, at which he was present, in his own town of Leupp in the southwest corner of the reservation and about 45 miles (72km) northeast of Flagstaff, Arizona.

On the evening of 12 March 1997 six or seven huge lights appeared on the horizon, all circling like a train in a counterclockwise direction while sequentially changing colour from orange to green to blue and to red. The whole community witnessed this and proceeded to turn off their house lights and set their lawn chairs out "for a block party". The show went on for fully 40 minutes before the lights exited to the west in the direction of the Grand Canyon and were lost to sight.

John expected the spectacular performance to be covered in the media the following day, but something else happened that blew everything else off the news. The Phoenix Lights appeared in the same general area and immediately became one of the most famous UFO events of all time (see **FT102:45**).

As an intriguing postscript Jon said that the Leupp lights were caught on cine film. Just a few days later a casually dressed guy appeared claiming to be a Federal Agent and offering to have the film developed. John trustingly gave him the material and of course he never heard from this atypical man in not-black ever again.

There is one short video on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbK1-8BR4Zg&t=19s) where John relates these happenings. In it, he also says that while UFO events happen all the time he has frequently asked native experiencers if they ever file reports to MUFON or similar organisations. When they say no and he asks why, the oft-repeated answer is moving. "Because everyone is gonna' come up here and the lights won't come back anymore." The reaction of the audience in the

video speaks for itself.

Jon had brought along his son and daughter to the meal and they also related their own weird experiences. All four told me seemingly impossible stories of time shifts where journeys across the desert can often be much shorter or much longer than expected.

The girl said her brother could even make this phenomenon happen himself; after initially demurring, the teenager described some of his own deliberate time-shifting volitions in the simple truth-telling way of the Navajo that I was getting used to.

And so it went on, the mind-bending narratives of these supernatural detectives and their family. My new friends were not just investigators, but also experiencers of the most extravagant paranormal events.

I brought them over to Stirling a year later to speak twice at our Festival. At the beginning of their first talk they put up a slide showing them both wearing the Celtic tops I had sent them as presents. The audience got the joke – the rivalry between Glasgow's Celtic and Rangers football teams is long established – although some enjoyed it more than others!

These quiet truth-tellers inspired the same reactions in their audiences in Scotland that I had felt in their company in Arizona. The second show was in the absolutely crammed community hall in the small village of Kinlochard, deep in Rob Roy territory at the head of Loch Ard in the Trossachs. For me this completed a very meaningful circle.

THE RANGERS GO GLOBAL

The world was soon to hear a lot more about the Rangers and in recent years a popular mystique has developed around them and their work. They have appeared on numerous TV shows, including the very successful *The Secret of Skinwalker Ranch* (see **FT398:21**), which recently aired its fourth series. They featured most prominently in the Netflix production *Unsolved Mysteries: Navajo Rangers* which first aired two years ago. Unlike many US paranormal documentaries, which tend to favour loud and overly kinetic styles in an attempt to inject a spurious sense of excitement into often flimsy narratives, this excellent film is strong on content and character at the same time as being gently paced and quietly elegiac in style. Making appropriate use of the spectacular landscapes of the Southwest, it lets Jon and Stan tell their own stories at their own pace in their own territory, to manifestly better effect than most of their head-pounding and headache-inducing stablemates.

A decade passed after our Festival meeting and we kept in touch with occasional emails, always saying how much we wanted to revisit each other's homes. It was a delightful surprise therefore a few months ago to receive an email from Stan with a PDF of a new book he had written, to be published by HarperCollins.

PHOTOS COURTESY STANLEY MILFORD JR

LEFT: A two-year-old Stan wearing the headdress that was part of his father's regalia for Native American dance performances.

Stan was raised with a deep-rooted connection to the supernatural due to his diverse heritage, grounded in Navajo and Cherokee traditions; as he says in his book, it was an upbringing that uniquely positioned him to navigate the strange realms he would encounter when he joined the Navajo Rangers.

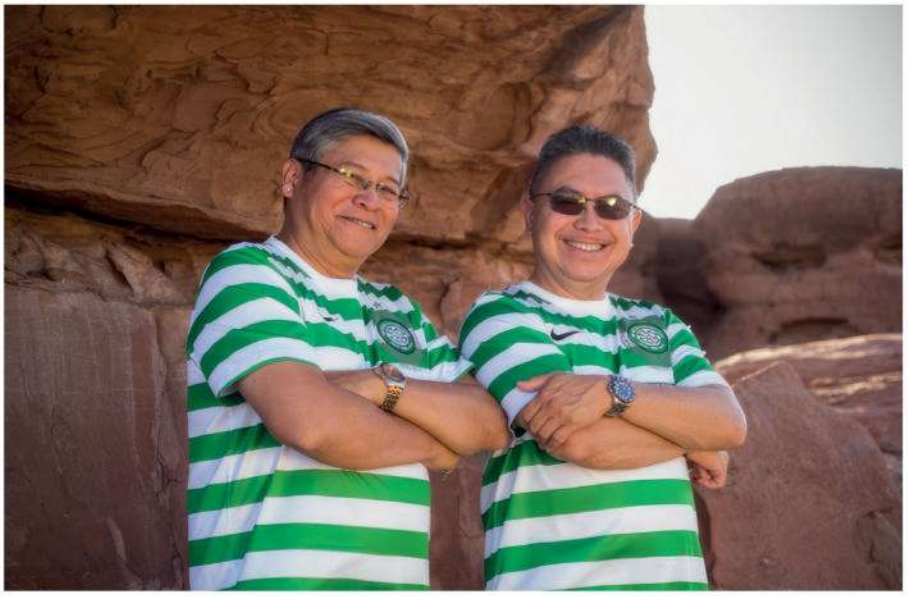
He spent his early years both on and off of the Reservation. In term time, he lived on a farm and ranch:

"I grew up in two very different worlds. One was the mainstream – and primarily Western – culture of Oklahoma, where I lived and went to school. The other was traditional Native American culture, which I received from both my mother, who was Cherokee, and my father, who was a full-blooded Navajo. I lived most of the time in Oklahoma with my mother, but the summers and holidays I spent with my father on the Navajo Reservation, where traditional beliefs and practices were a part of daily life, and shaped me just as much."

He brings a fascinating and original structural approach to the writing of his life story.

"Interspersed with my own real-life story are tales from the Diné Bahane', or Navajo Emergence, which explains how the Diné, or Navajo, people were created. Many other Indigenous peoples have a similar origin story. This story of the Navajo people's creation was passed down from generation to generation through the centuries as an oral tradition. My own Navajo family members, including my father, paternal grandmother, many aunts, uncles, and cousins, as well as friends, passed it on to me."

Growing up between Native American and mainstream Western culture enabled Stan later to approach paranormal cases with a balance of cultural insight and scientific objectivity. When he first became a Ranger he handled everyday cases such as cattle inspections and domestic disputes as well as more serious operations staking out and



ABOVE: Jonathan (left) and Stan in 2013 – a pair of Rangers in Celtic football shirts.

COURTESY STANLEY MILFORD JR

LEFT: Sixty-six apported coins collected during the Window Rock case. **BELOW:** The Rangers appeared in the Netflix series *Unsolved Mysteries* in 2022.

hunting down dangerous criminals. In the book, gritty cases like these gradually give way to more bizarre investigations – mysterious livestock mutilations, spine-chilling encounters with Skinwalkers and cryptids, UFOs and malicious hauntings – when the Rangers' brief is widened to include the outer limits of police work.

Stan convincingly asserts that the paranormal cases he and Jon Dover are assigned often tend to be ignored by law enforcement, leaving victims feeling alone and uncared for. He has always been committed to making sure that everyone who experiences a paranormal event feels they are taken seriously and their voices heard.

STRANGE INVESTIGATIONS

Stan's book marks out the broad and fascinating territory of his life and the culture he represents, but the chapters dealing with inexplicable and supernatural goings-on will probably hold the greatest interest for forteans.

Cryptid aficionados will be greatly engaged by the account of a massive communal sighting and a subsequent – and typically fruitless – hunt for a Bigfoot. In upper Fruitland, a beautiful farming community along the San Juan River in New Mexico, over 300 locals had reported sightings of Bigfoot lumbering along the riverbank – reports that the local police department had dismissed. Seeking answers, the community reaches out to the Navajo Rangers to conduct an official investigation along the river. Sightings of the elusive creatures are almost commonplace in these parts, but aside from frequent discoveries of massive footprints, the phenomenon remains tantalisingly beyond the grasp of the pursuers.The Rangers have investigated many UFO sightings, but one of the more fascinating cases involved Hoss Lors, a non-Navajo resident of the reservation. The 'Satan's Butte' case is covered concisely on the *Unsolved Mysteries Fandom* site.

"Hoss spent 10 years on the reservation teaching English as a second language. He had been living near Greasewood, Arizona, for about a year when his sightings began to occur. Satan's Butte, a barren flat-top mesa with a bad reputation among the Navajo as a gathering site for Skinwalkers, was very near his home.

SHOWERS OF COINS APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE AND CASCADED DOWN ON THEM

"One night in 2008, around dusk, he went out to feed his horses when an odd light in the sky caught his attention. He could not figure out what it was. A few nights later, he saw a 'large ship' hovering above Satan's Butte, very close to where he had seen the other light.

"Hoss says the ship went straight across the sky and then dipped down. It had red lights along the front. Coming out of it were tendrils of light that looked like teardrops as they dropped to the ground. The light was coming from inside the ship. He was not sure if the tendrils were little 'UFO ships', but he noticed that they were glowing.

"One week later, Hoss saw the ship again. He grabbed his camera and took several pictures of it and its lights. After reviewing the photographs and other evidence, Stan and Jon felt that, from an investigator's standpoint, Hoss's sightings were 'outstanding'. Hoss says that none of the Navajo people he talked to were shocked by what he had seen. Before his sightings, he was a sceptic and did not think aliens or UFOs existed. However, the Navajo Nation taught him that there are things out there that no one understands."

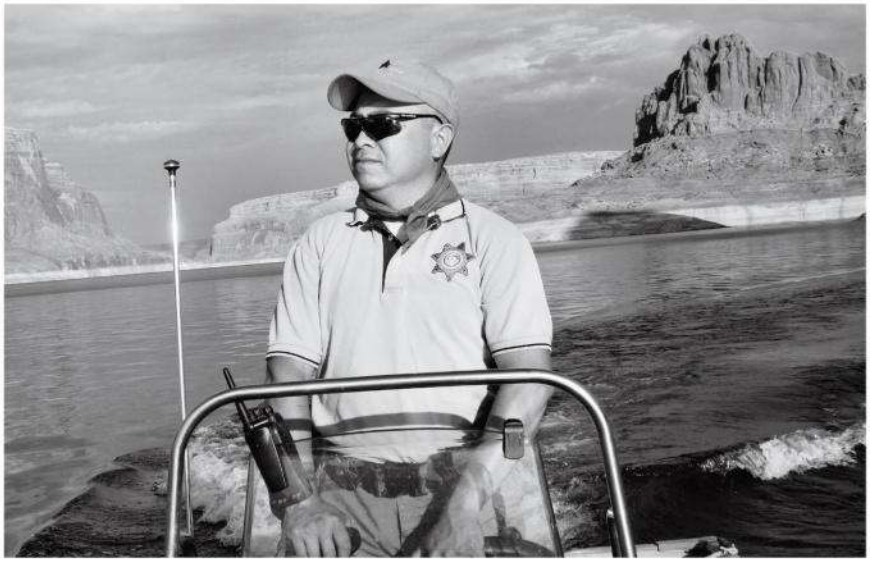
Perhaps the most inexplicable of all the cases our intrepid duo investigated was the Window Rock haunting. As mentioned earlier, it involved showers of coins appearing out of nowhere on several occasions and cascading down on the investigators – all landing heads up. After the initial apports of 66 coins during the poltergeist investigation Stan reckons that around 100 other coins have appeared on different occasions in different places. Even if a determined sceptic was able to conjure up a tortuous explanation for the apports themselves, the chances of them all repeatedly landing with the same face-upwards orientation involves an astronomical degree of impossibility. The tricksterish phenomena continue to the present day.

Even now, retired from the Navajo Nation after 30 years' service, Stan still experiences instances of the phenomenon; as in cases of poltergeist contagion (see **FT438:30-35**), certain aspects of his work have followed him home. As he told me on a recent WhatsApp call: "One event occurred one morning at the Love's Truck Stop Gas Station and Store. A black gentleman standing right next to me witnessed the occurrence. He was in total shock…"

Not long ago Stan was acting as a guide and taking a small party into the Canyon de Chelly National Monument. This is a vast

COURTESY OF NETFLIX

THE NAVAJO RANGERS



TOP: Stanley Milford Jr taking his law enforcement oath in December 1997. **CENTRE:** Stan helming a patrol boat on the San Juan River in an operation to recover a missing body; later that day he and Jon witnessed a UFO. **ABOVE:** A heavily armed Stan on special assigment providing security for a vaccine shipment.

PHOTOS COURTESY STANLEY MILFORD JR

MISSION STATEMENT

To protect and preserve the cultural, historical and archæological resources of the Navajo Nation, through law enforcement, public education, preventive patrols, and regulatory enforcement. To safeguard and preserve the livestock property of residents to maintain the cultural and traditional significance of this resource for future generations of Diné.

The Navajo Rangers service, formed in 1957, maintains and protects the tribal nation's public works, natural resources, natural and historical sites and also assists travellers.

Perhaps surprisingly, its founder was a white man, Richard Fowler Van Valkenburgh. An archæologist and ethnographer, he worked tirelessly on behalf of the Navajo and Hopi tribes and helped them particularly in securing land rights and preserving historic Navajo records. Very soon after the Ranger service was set up he died and was buried in the Navajo Cemetery at Fort Defiance, in an honoured place next to the late leader of the Navajo, Chee Dodge.

The Rangers patrol and protect the massive 27,000-square-mile Navajo Nation, spanning portions of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. Their tasks are often mundane, but sometimes challenging and occasionally mind-bending.

The officers of the Ranger Service are equal parts police officers, archæological conservationists, historians, emergency service first-responders, search-and-rescue operatives and evacuation specialists. As such, all of the officers have extremely impressive skillsets including, but not limited to, expertise with firearms, tracking, firefighting and proficiency in investigating people and events.

park in northeastern Arizona on Navajo tribal lands. Its prominent features include Spider Rock, featuring tall rock spires and towering sandstone cliffs surrounding a verdant canyon. Inhabited by several Native American peoples for millennia, the area is dotted with prehistoric rock art.

It was also the site of more tragic historical events. In 1863, Kit Carson sent troops through the canyon, killing 23 Navajo, seizing 200 sheep, and destroying hogans as well as peach orchards and other crops. The resulting demoralisation led to the surrender of the Navajo and their removal to Bosque Redondo in New Mexico.

After a long day as party leader Stan was settling down in his tent when he looked up and saw a single coin materialise above him. It then fell to the floor of the tent.

"The most recent coin apport was on Monday, 12 August 2024 at 8.52am MDT. The coin, a 2017-D US dime landed near the foot of my bed."

You can probably guess which way up it landed...

In the book's final chapter Stan develops a theory about what is behind all of the otherworldly manifestations that he and Jon have encountered. He believes that paranormal events serve as a wakeup call for humankind, contending that such phenomena are happening at unprecedented rates for a reason: our world and lives are out of balance, with a planet in crisis, multiple countries at war and suffering migrant crises, drug epidemics and the like. Everywhere we are drowning in an ocean of human suffering. Stan believes that this turmoil and trauma can create paranormal hotspots, so that when we encounter the supernatural it is an opportunity to question how we are living and the very nature of reality itself.

Investigating and coming face to face with the paranormal has expanded Stan's view of the Universe and what life can be. He believes it has made him a better Ranger and a better person, opening his eyes to the needs of his community and the possibilities of human experience. Each paranormal event has brought him "closer to the truth and to the deep meaning of the world."

A NECESSARY REVISIONISM

It is possible to see in Stanley Milford's book, and the numerous TV shows mentioned, a long overdue re-examination of the Native American experience at the hands of a brutal, genocidal colonialism. While a recent film like Martin Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon* is a major contribution to this process, it has also been viewed in some quarters as exploitative. Radheyan Simonpillai, for example, in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* described Scorsese as "a settler filmmaker… telling a story about Indigenous people that is not necessarily his to tell.

The very positive difference here is that Stanley Milford Jr's story, at once pleasingly ordinary and also utterly strange and unsettling, is absolutely told from the inside. It is a story about his culture and for his culture, and an important book that will engage both the fortean and the ethnographer.

And if some promising whispers prove to be true there could even be a scripted TV series or movie somewhere down the road. Let's hope they hire a Native American director for that job if it happens...

COURTESY STANLEY MILFORD JR

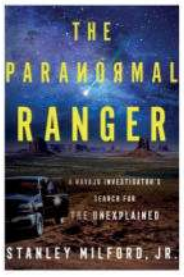
ABOVE: Stanley Milford Jr today.

TELEVISION APPEARANCES BY *STANLEY MILFORD JR*

BEYOND SKINWALKER RANCH (S1, E7) *Navajo Nation*, aired 25 July 2023
UNSOLVED MYSTERIES (S3, E5) *Paranormal Rangers*, aired 25 October 2022
PARANORMAL EMERGENCY (S1, E10) *Rangers Investigate Haunted Office Building*, aired 28 October 2019
INDIANS AND ALIENS (S2, E2) *The Navajo Files*, aired 11 September 2017

For more on the Paranormal Rangers, and a Native American UFO conference, see **FT361:42-47**.

PETER BROUGHAN is a Scottish film producer of award-winning international feature films like *Rob Roy* and *The Flying Scotsman*. He established The Scottish Paranormal Festival in 2013 and is a member of The Friday Freaks, a Zoom group of like-minded experiencers and students of the weird and the wonderful. He is also a passionate fan of Glasgow Celtic, having been baptised in the same church where the club was founded in 1888 to help feed hungry immigrant children.



The Paranormal Ranger: A Navajo Investigator's Search for the Unexplained **by Stanley Milford Jr is published by HarperCollins (ISBN: 9780063371057) and is also available in E-Book and Digital Audio format.**

The Case of the Vanishing Earl

On the 50th anniversary of a brutal murder and a mysterious disappearance, **PHIL BAKER** sifts through the evidence, weighs up the competing theories and asks if it really was Lord Lucan, in the basement, with the lead piping...

EVENING STANDARD / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Lord Lucan and the soon to be Lady Lucan announce their engagement in October 1963.

Like the identity of Jack the Ripper and the fate of the *Mary Celeste*, the case of Lord Lucan has become an enduring mystery. The accepted story is that one night in November 1974 someone used a length of lead pipe to bludgeon a young woman – Sandra Rivett, the Lucan family's nanny – to death in the basement of the Lucans' Belgravia house, and this someone is generally thought to have been Lord Lucan himself: 39-year-old Richard Bingham, seventh Earl of Lucan, descended from the Lucan who caused the disastrous Charge of the Light Brigade. A former Guards officer, Lord Lucan was a professional backgammon player and gambler, driven to desperation by money problems and particularly by his failure to obtain custody of his three children. In the dark basement he seems to have mistaken the nanny for his estranged wife Veronica, Countess of Lucan, who was the real target. After that he made a relatively ineffectual attack on Lady Lucan herself before she escaped to a nearby pub covered in blood and crying "Help me... He's murdered my nanny!" Lucan then made a remarkable disappearance, and his fate is still unknown.

THE MURDER

Public fascination centred on Lucan's vanishing trick, but the whole case grows stranger the more you look at it, and it is studded with bizarre details and coincidences; not least that another Lucan nanny was later murdered. Before the disappearance, even the facts of the crime are disputed. At one end of the spectrum comes the argument that Lucan was innocent and his own story true. In a couple of phone calls and scribbled notes, within hours of the incident, he claimed that he was passing the house at 46 Lower Belgrave Street, saw a man – perhaps a burglar – attacking his wife, and rushed in to save her, after which the man escaped.

The whole case is studded with bizarre details and coincidences

The idea that Lucan was entirely innocent hit some nasty bumps as more evidence emerged. He seems to have told several friends variously that he'd like to kill his wife; that he was going to kill her (Lady Osbourne, mother of his friend John Aspinall, told him he must do whatever he thought was right); and even how he was going to do it. Lucan had experience of powerboat racing, and he told another friend, Greville "Grovel" Howard, now Lord Howard, that he planned to lose Veronica's body in the deep water near the mouth of the river Solent. He allegedly told another friend he'd made timed practice drives to the coast with a weight in the boot to simulate a body.

A variant on the idea that Lucan didn't kill the nanny suggests that he hired a hitman, then dropped by to check how things had gone, tidy up (while the children were watching television on a higher floor) and possibly collect a body, or put it in the basement safe until the time was right. At this stage he should have been the only living adult in the house, because it should have been the nanny's night off (something he had already ascertained by asking the children). Instead, he found a disaster in progress and the nanny already dead. A more benevolent version of this theory suggests that Lucan hired a hitman but then changed his mind,

and he was going to the house to intercept him when he stumbled into a bloodbath.

One consideration in favour of the hitman theory is that if Sandra Rivett was not stunned or killed with the first blow, as some accounts claim, and instead there was a struggle and a sustained attack, then you might think that if the attacker was Lucan then he should have heard her voice and realised it was the wrong woman. Further, the style and level of violence in the two attacks seems different. The attack on Lady Lucan seems less savage, but this might be explained by Lucan losing heart on finding he'd killed the wrong woman, and then finding he couldn't murder his wife face-to-face.

According to Lady Lucan there was a fight: Lucan hit her with the lead piping and thrust a gloved hand in her mouth, while she managed to say "Don't you dare touch my pearls!" and grabbed his balls. With the fight gone out of him they ended up having a relatively reasonable talk, during which he suggested she might like to lie down and take some sleeping pills (the suggestion may have been an overdose) and she had the inspired idea of offering to help dispose of the nanny's body. Then, while he was trying to clean himself up at the bathroom sink and she could hear the sound of taps, she made a run for it and escaped to the Plumber's Arms, just down the road.

THE Sun

CASANOVA MILHENCH: PAGE FI

EARL SOUGHT IN DEATH MYSTERY

Don't miss THE SUPERCOPS every day in The Sun next week

The Supercops

MURDER squad detectives were trying last night to trace the 39-year-old Earl of Lucan.

NANNY IS FOUND MURDERED

ESCAPED

FILM

EXCLUSIVE! ALL NEXT WEEK, THE REMARKABLE INSIDE STORY OF BRITAIN'S MUCH-MALIGNED POLICE

THE DISAPPEARANCE

It is with theories of Lucan's disappearance that things really become baroque. But the first thing to remember is that he didn't "plan to disappear", as some of the more downmarket accounts have said. He planned to make his wife disappear, which is very different. He wanted custody of the children (he was by all accounts a wonderful father and much loved by the children, who were less happy with Lady Lucan). For that to happen he would have had to maintain a normal front after his wife – who was highly intelligent but unhappy, with a long history of psychiatric treatment – appeared to have gone out and never come back. If this was the plan, it was unwise and probably doomed from the start, because Lucan didn't realise how bloody head injuries are: there was blood on the walls and even the ceiling, and so much on the floor that he slipped up in it and got it on his trousers. In the event of an investigation, it was going to take more than a wet mop to defeat forensic science and pretend Lady Lucan had simply walked off somewhere.

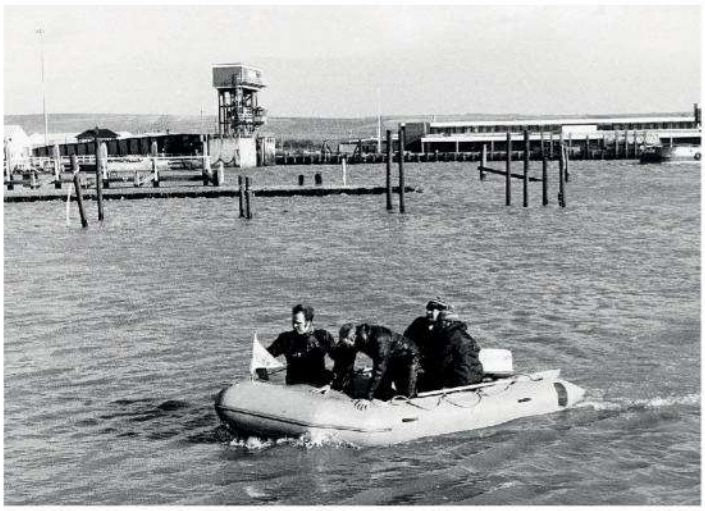
Lucan must have been in a desperate state in the following few hours. We know he rang his mother twice while the police were with her (and apparently not from phone boxes; an interesting detail in itself). In one of these calls he said, "Oh mother, there was something terrible in the basement. I couldn't bring myself to look" – almost certainly a reference to Sandra Rivett's body, which the killer had stuffed inside a US mail bag. In Lucan's defence, we might think this has an oddly authentic ring to it. On the other hand, the bag may have come from the post room at the Clermont gambling club, of which Lucan was a key member.

He also wrote three letters. To his friend Bill Shand Kydd he said he had interrupted a fight between his wife and an attacker, and she had accused him of hiring the man. He asked Shand Kydd to look after his children, and one day explain to them "the dream" (or just possibly "the disease") "of paranoia", by which he must have meant Lady Lucan's. He said he was going to "lie doggo for a while." A second letter was about his debts, and how he was going to clear them. And a third was to a friend called Michael Stoop, who had lent him his Ford Corsair car in place of Lucan's usual Mercedes. This referred to "a traumatic night of unbelievable coincidences" and asked Stoop to tell his children "that you knew me and that all I cared about was them". It was sent without a stamp, with a charge to pay, and the postmark would be very interesting, particularly to people who think Lucan made a successful escape of some kind. Unfortunately, Stoop said he had thrown the envelope away, supposedly in a moment of absent-mindedness.

Lucan seems to have gone to the coast. On the way he called on the last friend to see him, Susan Maxwell-Scott at Uckfield in East Sussex, and gave her his account of events (with "blood everywhere" – and, according to some commentators, the fact that he *had* engaged a hitman, which she never made public). She gave him a stiff whisky and some Valium. He then pressed on into the night and abandoned the car at Newhaven, the harbour town associated with the ferry to France. Or at least, someone did: it has been suggested the car was a decoy, dumped there by someone else. Whoever drove it, the car had blood inside and a home-made lead cosh in the boot, unused but similar to the one at 46 Lower Belgrave Street. It is also notable that it took seven hours for the car to appear

TOP: The murder of nanny Sandra Rivett (above) and Lucan's disappearance made headline news in 1974.

TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Lucan's gambling friend John Aspinall; one outlandish theory suggests the dead Earl was fed to Aspinall's tigers. **TOP RIGHT:** A more plausible fate was drowning; fruitless searches for a body were made off Newhaven. **RIGHT:** Wing Commander Kenneth Wallis mounted his own search from the air in a gyrocopter.

at Newhaven, when the actual drive takes 20 minutes.

At this point Lucan may have escaped to the Continent, or drowned himself in the sea. No corpse has ever washed up, but James Fox, one of the best writers on the case, has suggested that if a corpse is trawled up in a fishing boat's net then the trawlermen are tempted, so as not to have their contaminated catch impounded, to puncture it and sink it. Home Office pathologist Keith Simpson told Fox that crabs in the area will pick a body clean in a couple of days. There is also the possibility, suggested by Lucan's friend Charles Benson, that he could have shot himself in some desolate spot on the South Downs, "a pot hole in deep undergrowth" – somewhere he might already have scouted out as a place for Veronica's body.

Then there is the theory that he might have been fed to the tigers in John Aspinall's private zoo. Theories of assisted suicide or collusive murder have produced some of the trashiest writing on the case, including a potboiler by John Pearson – who had earlier written quality books on Ian Fleming, the Kray twins and even Edith Sitwell – in which he alleged there was an underworld facility at Newhaven used by gangland criminals for getting rid of bodies (in the same way gangsters are sometimes said to dispose of bodies with pig farmers) and that this was where Lucan planned to take Veronica's corpse.

Lucan has been seen on every continent and in casinos all over the world

Daily Mirror

EUROPE'S BIGGEST DAILY SALE

Dragnet for the murder-riddle Earl

WHERE DID HE GO?

Sacked! Exit for actress Mary

SCOTLAND YARD

VISIT AT MIDNIGHT

Instead, he fled to the Continent, where Pearson claimed he was murdered by "Mr X" and hinted that it was done on the orders of Aspinall. Pearson claimed to base all this on what he said Susan Maxwell-Scott had told him, and by then she was conveniently dead.

Maxwell-Scott – who may well have known more than she let on – also figures in a slightly more logical, lateral-thinking theory. This is based on remembering that her house is Lucan's last known solid location before he seems to have virtually dematerialised. Perhaps he got no further than Uckfield, and the police should have dug up the Maxwell-Scott back garden. This scenario was the basis of a BBC programme in 2005, and it would be a rare Lucan theory that didn't have at least something to support it – in this case, a call the police received claiming that three men were seen walking to the bottom of the garden, there were a couple of gunshots, and only two men walked back.

THE ESCAPE

Of the two policemen in charge of the case, Chief Superintendent Roy Ranson and Detective Chief Inspector David Gerring, Ranson believed Lucan was dead, but Gerring published a book called *Lucan Lives!* and claimed for some years to believe that he was alive (and never went to Newhaven). It is the idea of Lucan's successful escape that really caught the public imagination.

TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE LEFT: Chief Superintendent Roy Ranson and Chief Inspector David Gerring believed Lucan was dead, although Gerring later popularised the esape idea. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Safari guide and ex-folk singer "Jungle Barry" was one identity mooted for the errant Earl. **BELOW:** A spoof postcard has fun with the tabloid Lucan mythos.

He had wealthy friends to help him and he might have gone to South America; or Africa, perhaps joining the Rhodesian army under an alias; or to Australia or New Zealand, perhaps starting a new life as a rancher or sheep farmer. Perhaps his friend the racing driver Graham Hill flew him out of the country in his private plane. Perhaps he had plastic surgery. The possibilities are endless, and often ridiculous.

Since disappearing, Lucan has had an afterlife to rival Elvis. He has been seen on every continent, gambled in casinos all over the world, and worked as a deckchair attendant. At one moment he manifested as safari guide, "Jungly Barry", an alcoholic former folk-singer who died in Goa. At another, he was calling himself Woodgate and living in New Zealand, sleeping in the back of a Land Rover with his pet possum and a goat called Camilla. Conversely, he stayed unseen, but an aide of John Aspinall's booked tickets for him so that he could watch his children from a distance when they went to Kenya and Namibia.

In fact, almost no responsible commentator thinks Lucan survived for very long. The most likely scenario is that he committed suicide in the sea, either at Newhaven or in the deep and murky water near the mouth of the Solent, near Southampton, perhaps in a scuttled small boat (he told a friend he had a boat on the south coast, and it seems to have figured in his plans to dispose of his wife). If it held a cargo of bullion and not a decomposing aristocrat, we might have found it by now. Yet still there are strange, anomalous pieces of information. Someone, for example, seems to have signed a hotel register in a Mozambique hotel under the false name "Maxwell-Scott". The mystery continues, and it was no less than Agatha Christie, towards the end of her life, who said "I wonder what *has* happened to Lord Lucan?"

THE BACKGROUND

The peculiar richness of the case was increased by the rarefied world in which it took place, and the more picturesque and quotable aspects of English upper-class life. One woman the police interviewed thought Sandra Rivett's death was a shame, "because nannies are hard to come by nowadays". Lady Lucan, although she was not from an aristocratic background herself, attributed her survival to "breeding", because well-bred people have thicker skulls. And in a memorable comment about the judge in the child custody case having little sympathy for Lucan's money problems, a friend observed that it was because the judge was middle-class, so he didn't understand about "*not working*."

NEWS OF THE WORLD
BRITAIN'S MOST POPULAR PAPER
SHOCK ISSUE!
INVASION OF THE KILLER COCKLES
~SEE PAGE 3
LORD LUCAN'S A DECKCHAIR ATTENDANT!
We find missing peer on the pier
INSIDE: KNIT YOUR OWN BIKINI FROM SEAWEED

Media treatment of the case included lashings of inverted snobbery: in the words of the *Guardian* newspaper Lucan was "a murderous Hooray Henry", a vicious upper-class oaf with a clique of rich and well-connected friends who aided his disappearance. The reality is more complex. Lucan was a sensitive and intelligent man who had been a boyhood friend of Jonathan Miller, the theatre director and satirist. As a child he had been in therapy with the famous psychoanalyst DW Winnicott, and he found relief from stress by playing Bach at the piano and teaching himself Scott Joplin rags. His charm also transcended that of your average Hooray Henry: James Bond producer Cubby Broccoli thought he would be a natural for the role of Bond, and Italian film director Vittorio De Sica saw him in a casino and wanted him to act opposite Shirley MacLaine in a film called *Woman Times Seven* (which eventually featured David Niven and Michael Caine), but Lucan froze in front of the camera and failed his screen test.

Nor was Lucan's background stereotypical. He spent formative childhood years in America during the war (a more privileged version of being an "evacuee" from wartime London, which traumatised many children and may have contributed to Lucan's insecurities) and he had a staunchly socialist mother who (with the Cold War in progress) was learning Russian. His father, George Bingham, the sixth Earl, commanded a Battalion of the Coldstream Guards during the Second World War, but was subsequently a Labour politician, having noticed during the war that some chaps "seem to have all the champagne and the girls – and others don't have anything".

THE LUCAN LITERATURE

Norman Lucas, *The Lucan Mystery* (1975).
Good solid account by professional non-fiction crime writer. No added theory.

James Fox, 'A Bad Day for Eton', *The New Review* (26 May 1976). Follow-up to Fox's *Sunday Times* article 'The Luck of the Lucans' (8 June 1975). Probably the best writer on the case, particularly on social aspects and milieu. Otherwise believes Lucan was guilty as per the standard account.

Sally Moore, *Lucan: Not Guilty* (1987). Remarkably spirited. Ends with a plea for Lucan to come forward and clear his name. Legal writer Marcel Berlins, reviewing it, concluded: "If I was Lord Lucan, I wouldn't hurry back."

Patrick Marnham, *Trail of Havoc* (1987) Hitman theory, with the twist that it may have been a last-minute deputy or replacement who botched the job. Wrong on the geography of the back garden, which figures in the argument, but Marnham is chiefly interested in the aftermath, and like Fox superb on the social aspect. Reviewing it, Fox expressed some sympathy with the hitman theory.

James Ruddick, *Lucan: What Really Happened* (1994). Hitman theory.

Roy Ranson, *Looking for Lucan: The Final Verdict* (1994). Not the final verdict.

David Gerring, *Lucan Lives* (1995). Ranson and Gerring are obviously of interest as primary inside sources, but not otherwise impressive. They both believe Lucan did it.

Laura Thompson, *A Different Class of Murder* (2014, 2018). Examines other theories with a preference for the hitman theory, and with the extra twist that Lucan might have been trying to call the hitman off at the last moment. Suggests Lady Lucan was mistaken or lying about what happened. The 2018 edition, after Lady Lucan's death, airs a far more extreme theory about her.

Veronica Lucan, *A Moment in Time* (2017). Published posthumously. Tragic and convincing: consistent with the standard account.

Lucan did not share his parents' politics. He was ultra-conservative, even by the standards of his own circle, and became known as "The Fossil". He refused to talk to anyone not wearing "proper shoes", by which he meant shoes with laces. Standards seemed to be declining everywhere. When the Clermont Club (owned by John Aspinall, who put real dwarves as ornaments in its neo-classical alcoves) was bought by Hugh Hefner and his *Playboy* empire, Lucan was appalled that the flag was not run down properly to half-mast at night.

Hatchards
187 Piccadilly, London, W1V 9DA
B 37545
LORD LUCAN
46 LOWER BELGRAVE ST
LONDON SW1
15 2 72
B37545
10 1 Armstrong GREY WOLF 50
10 1 HITLER MY STRUGGLE 1.00
1-50
ADVICE NOTE, INVOICE TO FOLLOW

LEFT: Lucan's receipt from Hatchards for the purchase of *Mein Kampf* and a book about Kemal Attaturk. **BELOW:** The former home of the Clermont Club at 44 Berkeley Square in London.

As a friend remembered: "He wanted to save England for grouse moors and stately homes." Unfortunately, his response to a changing world didn't end there: "He was very right-wing and never compromised… He never watered it down in front of liberals. He would talk about hanging and flogging and foreigners and niggers." Becoming increasingly extreme, Lucan listened to records of Hitler's speeches and bought a copy of *Mein Kampf*. The intensity of all this must have been exacerbated by mounting desperation with regard to his unbearable marriage and his beloved children. He began tape-recording his conversations with Lady Lucan, and in his flat – he had moved around the corner to 72a Elizabeth Street – he had not only endless detective novels but a collection of books on psychiatric illness.

He was, of course, thinking of his wife's and not his own. But Lucan's state of mind was partly a symptom of the so-called "Seventies Crisis", and of strange days in Britain. Things were not looking good from the Clermont. On top of long-haired student unrest, immigration, and trade union troubles, 1973 saw the 'oil crisis', the Three Day Week and the Miners' Strike. The unions had already been shutting down one or other of the nation's three TV channels for a night at a time, and now they cut the electricity supply. All over the country, families played board games by candlelight. Prime Minister Harold Wilson was suspected of having links to Russia – he did visit frequently – and even of being a KGB agent. 1974 was the year of plans for counter-revolution, with "private armies" such as "Civil Assistance" headed by General Sir Walter Walker, and "GB 75" headed by David Stirling, founder of the SAS. By the end of the decade there was a musical about Evita Peron, wife of Argentina's dictator, with Andrew Lloyd Webber explaining "we had an elected government basically overthrown by trade unions. There was serious talk of private armies… We kept seeing parallels in the story of an attractive extremist." And David Bowie, of all people, said (in August 1975) that Britain needed a dictator and "extreme right-wing government".

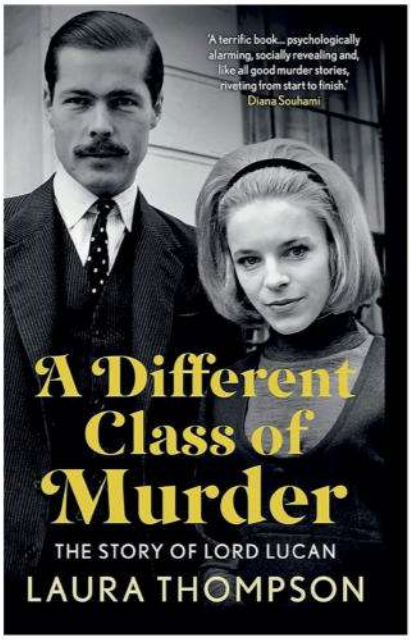
ANDY KAY / ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Meanwhile, one day early in 1972, Lucan walked into Hatchard's on Piccadilly, which in those days had a second-hand department, and bought two books (on account, with nothing so ungentlemanly as cash). They were Hitler's *My Struggle*, a Thirties translation of *Mein Kampf* (which I now own, complete with Lucan's receipt) and a book entitled *Grey Wolf: An Intimate Study of a Dictator*, about Kemal Ataturk. Lucan was also putting his money into jewellery, or perhaps talking about it more than doing it, saying it was portable and that in the event of a revolution it would be useful when fleeing the country.

THE THEORIES

Whatever strain Lucan was under, one of the weirdest details of the case has only recently come to light (see **FT426:4-5**). It sounds like an April Fool story, but seems to be true. There is a classic, *Cluedo*-style quality to the whole terrible business ("Lord Lucan, in the basement, with the lead piping") and this seems to have occurred to Lucan himself. The police revealed in 2022 that the car abandoned at Newhaven – which Lucan had been driving, whether or not he drove it that

TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO


'A terrific book... psychologically alarming, socially revealing and, like all good murder stories, riveting from start to finish.'
Diana Souhami
A Different Class of Murder
THE STORY OF LORD LUCAN
LAURA THOMPSON

ABOVE LEFT: In 1977, Lady Lucan appealed through the *Sunday Mirror* for her husband to give himself up. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Although according to Laura Thompson, Lucan's wife was far being from a victim in the affair. **BELOW:** In 2002 it emerged that three Cluedo cards had been found in Lucan's abandoned car.

far – had three Cluedo cards in it: Colonel Mustard, the lead piping, and the hall. The implication is that Lucan left them there, and this was cluelessly reported in some papers to mean that he left them to taunt police after he disappeared (he didn't, because he wasn't expecting to need to disappear) or to prove the murder of Sandra Rivett was "planned" (again nonsense, although they might suggest the murder of *someone* was planned). What can we say about them? If it wasn't quite a joke – and it's hard to believe Lucan found the situation funny – then perhaps they were carried like a lucky charm, in an almost talismanic way. More than that, they give the whole business the self-consciousness of a private work of art.

It is such a bizarre case that almost nothing seems impossible, although a theory involving Arnold Schwarzenegger (who did spend time in London) does push the envelope too far. There is also the theory that Sandra Rivett was the real target after all – she had been involved with several men in the area – and was attacked by someone other than Lucan or a Lucan hitman. This might recall the grim coincidence that another Lucan nanny, Christabel Boyce, was murdered by her husband in 1985, but it doesn't really explain why Lucan, if he stumbled in on it happening, then attacked his wife.

Unless, of course, Lady Lucan was lying. Laura Thompson, in a well-written if not entirely convincing 2014 book on the case, *A Different Class of Murder*, suggests Lady Lucan might have been mistaken or lying about who attacked her, perhaps even knowing it was not Lucan but taking her chance to discredit him, and then sticking to her story.

In a 2018 update to that book, Thompson goes further, and broaches the greatest twist of all. The killer of Sandra Rivett was, in fact, Lady Lucan. Thompson makes her case with ruthless logic: "One of the very few incontrovertible facts is that: only two adults were known to be in the house, one of whom died. There is no proof that Lucan was there at the actual time of Sandra's death. There is no question that Veronica was." As Thompson admits, this theory not only requires Veronica to have bludgeoned the nanny, but to have given herself a few smart whacks to the head for good measure. And why did she do it? "Because she was framing her husband in a supreme act of revenge." Deranged as it is, the wild, virtuoso logic of this is like a solution from the Sherlock Holmes stories.

But no. The most likely scenario is the generally accepted one. And the most likely end for Lucan is that he died in the sea not long after the murder. And yet. And yet…

THE AFTERLIFE

Lucan disappeared only to reappear, larger than life, in popular culture, perversely becoming something of a hero in the process. "Lord Lucan, he's a gem, isn't he?" said *Talented Mr Ripley* novelist Patricia Highsmith, "I've got rather fond of him. To think he's possibly still alive and living well!" And in the Heritage Babylon that is modern London, the Plumber's Arms – a very pleasant pub – has recently done the obvious thing and adopted a Lucan theme. He has featured in TV dramas, a couple of novels (one of them, *Aiding and Abetting*, by the highly respected Muriel Spark), and a couple of records, notably "Lord Lucan is Missing" by punk band The Dodgems. The final verdict to date belongs to John Peel. After playing a Dodgems session on his radio show he observed, in his trademark lugubrious voice: "I think, you know, that we shall never discover the whereabouts of the Noble Lord."

PHIL BAKER is the author of *The Devil is a Gentleman: The Life and Times of Dennis Wheatley* (Dedalus, 2009), *Austin Osman Spare* (Strange Attractor, 2011/2023), and *City of the Beast: The London of Aleister Crowley* (Strange Attractor, 2022). He has co-edited a collection of essays, *Lord of Strange Deaths: The Fiendish World of Sax Rohmer* (Strange Attractor, 2015).

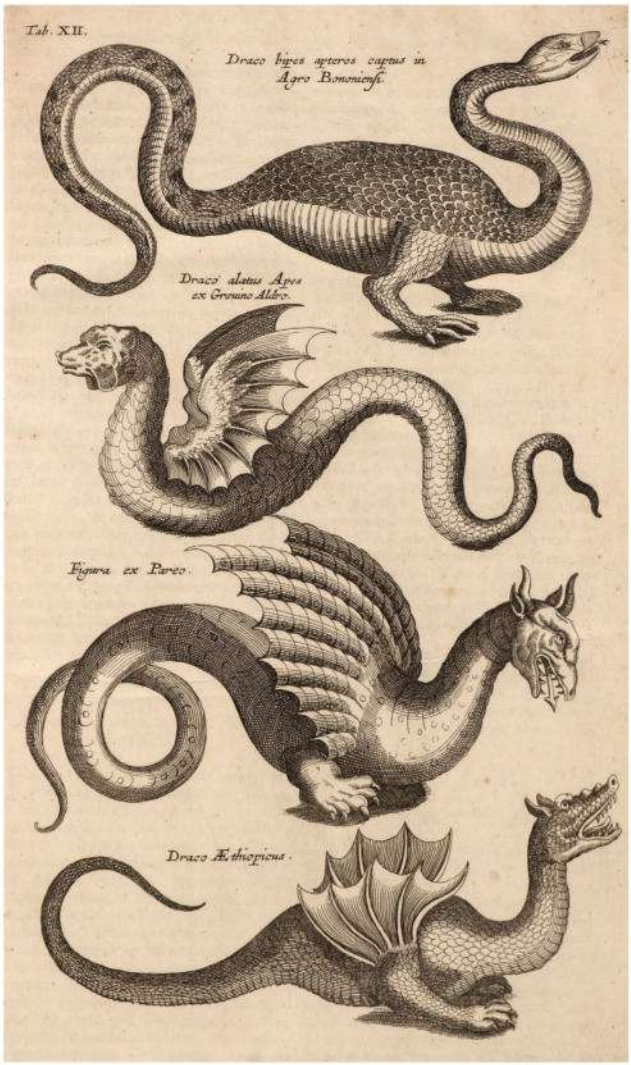
THE DRAGONS OF WAVERLEY ABBEY

Surely dragons are mythical monsters from the ancient past? It ain't necessarily so says RICHARD FREEMAN as he heads to Surrey – of all places – to investigate a contemporary sighting of this supposedly legendary creature...

The dragon is the great, great granddaddy of all monsters, an ancient creature that appears in every culture and country on Earth. The earliest dragon legends have been traced to South Africa and date back some 75,000 years.

Great Britain alone has over 100 dragon legends. Many UK dragon stories feature the beast appearing out of the blue, terrorising an area and then simply vanishing as mysteriously as it had appeared. There is no mention of a hero or damsel in distress. The dragons of Wormingford (Suffolk), Anwick (Lincolnshire) and Cawthorne (Yorkshire) are examples of this type of story. They sound much like modern-day accounts of mystery animals that turn up, scare and baffle witnesses and then disappear again.

Over the years, many theories have been put forward to explain dragon lore: the fossil bones of dinosaurs and other huge extinct animals; meetings with huge crocodiles and pythons; or a metaphor for 'energies' running through the Earth. None of them really offers a convincing explanation for dragon phenomena.


Tab. XII.
Draco bipes apteros captus in Agro Bononiensi.
Draco alatus Apes ex Gruuno Aldro.
Figura ex Pareo.
Draco Æthiopicus.

LEFT: Various types of dragon in an engraved plate from John Jonston's *De Serpentibus et Draconibus Libri II*, 1657.

MODERN DRAGONS

Most people, at least in the West, would think that the dragon is a creature of folklore with no basis in reality. Yet people all over the world claim to have encountered dragons – even in modern times. I have been collecting these accounts for some time. Here are just a few.

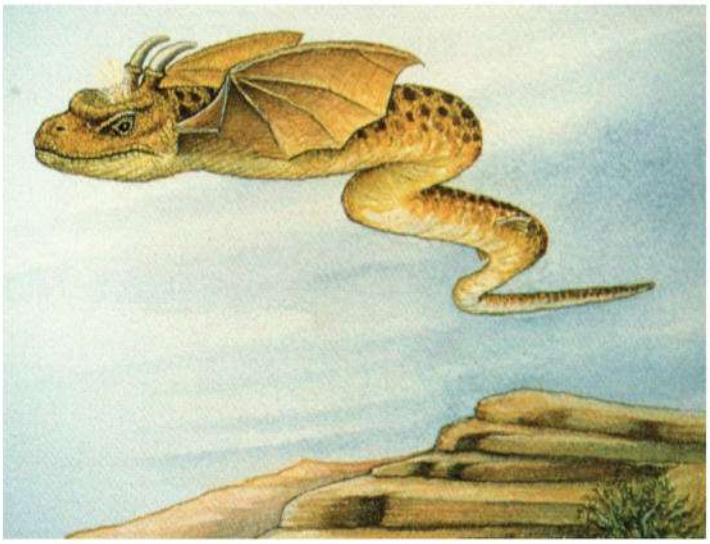
In Namibia, there is a tradition of a giant, winged serpent that has a glowing gem in its horned head.

One of the most dramatic sightings was in 1978, when a French farmer who was tending his cattle in the Karas region saw a bright white light heading straight towards him. Then he heard a massive thud and one of his cattle cry out in pain. As he rushed to see what had attacked the cow, he got a surprise. He told the local police: "I saw what looked like... the best matching description I can give you is that it looked like a dragon. It had a white, bright light on its head, which was blinding me, the colour of it was brown and yellow, it had green eyes, there was a tar-like smell coming from it and it had smoke coming out of its nostrils."

> PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD CLAIM TO HAVE SEEN DRAGONS

Viking folklore is full of dragon legends, so the next account should come as no surprise. In 2010, the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull erupted, spewing out titanic clouds of ash into the atmosphere and grounding planes for weeks. One local man watching the eruption saw something flying around the volcano. He realised that what he saw must have been huge due to the great distance he was observing it from. At first he thought it was a plane, until he saw its wings flapping. In an e-mail to Lars Thomas, the Danish biologist and cryptozoologist, he wrote: "As I see it, there are only two possible explanations: either I was imagining the whole thing, or what I saw was in fact a dragon. I find that very hard to believe, but then again, I don't think I could imagine something like that."

In the late 20th and early 21st century, Gunung Kancing, a mountain in the province of Lampung, Western Java, was thought to be the lair of a dragon the locals called the *ular naga* or dragon snake. It was described as resembling a huge snake with a horse-like head and bat's wings. The monster terro-



PHILIPPA FOSTER

LINDA GODFREY

ABOVE LEFT: An artist's impression of the Namibian flying serpent by Philippa Foster. **ABOVE RIGHT:** An eyewitness sketch of the dragon-like creature seen by multiple witnesses at Oconto Falls, Wisconsin, in 2007. **BELOW:** Waverley Abbey, the location for a multiple-witness dragon sighting in December 2023.

rised Peserwaran village for years. It stole and ate children, often attacking in broad daylight while their parents were busy in the fields. One village elder, Darga, said that the dragon was seen almost daily. In the end, the villagers blocked up the entrance to the cave where they thought the creature lurked. After that, the attacks stopped, but the people were so scared that many abandoned their homes and moved to other villages.

In 2007, the late fortean researcher Linda S Godfrey was contacted by witnesses who claimed to have seen dragons in Wisconsin.[1] One young man she calls 'Jim' (a pseudonym) told her that on 7 October that year he and some friends had attended a concert in Oconto Falls. They were lying on the top of their vans and on the grass looking up at the sky when they all saw something strange. A ball of orange and blue fire shot across the sky, followed by something even weirder.

Jim said: "We knew it had to be a dragon, because how else would you describe something flying over that was almost silent, larger than a plane, had a tail, bat-like wings, a long neck, and a narrow, pointed head and scales? I remember noticing the scales because they dimly reflected the street lights below. We thought we were all seeing things, but five minutes later it flew over again, this time in the opposite direction."

Linda was later in contact with Jim's mother, whom she referred to as 'Janet'. Jim had phoned his mother for a lift and told her what he had seen. Janet thought her son was joking and went to pick him up. She noticed a shadow crossing a parking lot then saw a fireball, blue with orange around it, shooting from east to west in the sky. Jim told her that he and his friends had seen the same thing before the dragon had arrived. Janet then drove her son home.

Linda also spoke to Jim's sister Jill. Jim had talked her into staying up. The pair lay on a trampoline in their back yard looking at the sky. They saw a fireball shooting east to west followed quickly by one moving west to east. Then they heard a loud screech that caused all the local dogs to bark. Then the dragon returned. The creature was flying only 20 feet (6m) above their two-storey house. After looking at pictures of pterosaurs they saw that the wing structure was very different. The family also saw smaller dragons that they took to be the young of the larger ones. The smaller creatures seemed to be playing, circling each other.

Jill said: "I don't care what the scientists say, it was NOT a pterodactyl. I could see it had pearly, pale scales. And the fireball came from its mouth. They were beautiful and flew gracefully. I could see they had four legs, too. They were tucked up underneath them like when a bird flies."

This case is interesting as the creature is described as a 'true' dragon, having four legs and two wings. Most screen depictions of them these days make the mistake of only giving them two legs, technically making them wyverns. Here, it seems, the witnesses were not influenced by the contemporary media.

WINGS OVER THE ABBEY

But what of Great Britain? On 27 December 2023 there was a multiple witness sighting of dragons at Waverley Abbey – the remains of an old Cistercian monastery founded in 1128 – near Farnham in Surrey. I am currently conducting an ongoing investigation into the case.

A group of 10 people, ghost hunters from the South Coast Ghosts group, had been visiting the Abbey on the evening in question when all of them saw some very strange flying creatures.

I arranged to interview one of the witnesses at the site itself and, together with fellow fortean Jackie Tonks, travelled to Surrey. The witness was a Polish woman named Dora, who met us at the Abbey.

The group, she told us, had been using a Ouija board in the cloister of the Abbey at about 9pm in the evening. The planchette had spelled out the name 'Zozo'. Zozo was a supposed demonic entity contacted by an American paranormal investigator called Darren Evens in 2009.[2] After ending the

RICHARD FREEMAN

ROBERT HOPE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Ouija session the group tried table turning, using a portable table with fold-up legs. While their hands were on the table it shook violently and the legs snapped shut.

At about 10pm, they moved over to a large yew tree in the grounds of the Abbey. Glancing over to some woods around 200 metres (650ft) away, Dora saw a huge flying creature emerge, bank in the air, then dive back into the trees. Its wings were bat-like and roughly 10 metres (33ft) across, measured against the trees. None of the others saw this.

Then, another, smaller creature flew into view, much closer. Dora said it was man-sized, about six feet long (1.8m) with a 10-foot (3m) wingspan and dark brown in colour. Again, the wings were bat-like. The creature landed on the the South Transept of the Abbey ruins. She did not get a look at the creature's head, but saw a long tail that ended in an "arrow head" point. The beast then flew off. The geese in a nearby river were honking loudly at the time.

Dora produced a rough sketch of what she saw. She admitted to being very frightened at the time, telling us: "I did not believe in dragons before, but now I certainly do."

She was still frightened, believing that the creatures were 'demonic'. I tried to reassure her, explaining that dragons were thousands of years older than the Christian conception of them.

Some days later I arranged to talk to some of the other witnesses on a Zoom call.

Darren Graham said that the group had met at the Abbey at about 7pm. On the way in from the car park, he saw two white lights in the sky that shot away fast. In the cloisters he was using a Three Field Meter Mk 3 to detect static fields. The meter was, in his words, "going mad".

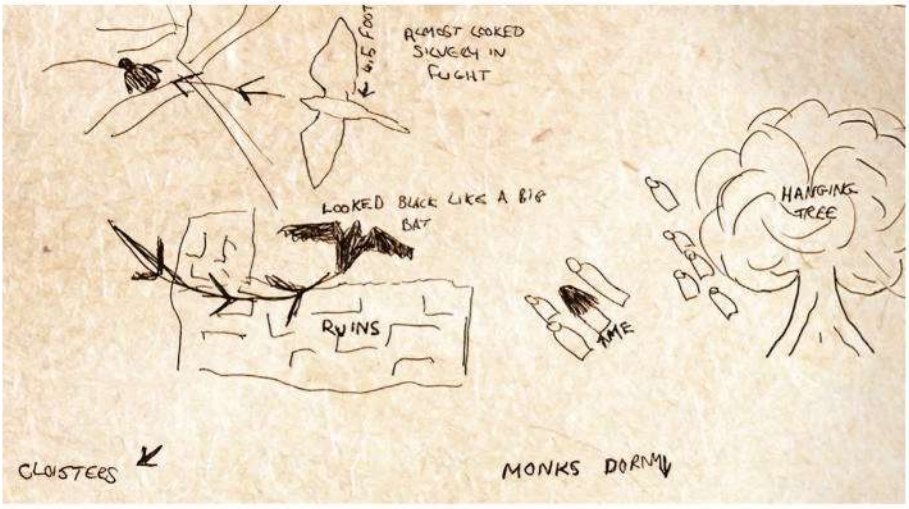
ABOVE THE RUINS, FLYING TOWARDS THEM, WAS A BIG, BAT-LIKE CREATURE

Another member, Luke Sturgess, caught a glimpse of two "dark things" swooping about in the sky. During the table-turning session, the table was thrown about violently and they all felt uneasy.

The group moved to the yew tree, where a member called Nigel wanted to try the Ouija board again. The geese started to make a noise, and then someone cried "Look at that!" About 100 feet (30m) away, above the ruins and flying towards them was a big, bat-like creature. Darren said it was long and black and made a fruit bat look tiny. Its body was about six feet (1.8m) long and he estimated the wings to be eight feet (2.4m) across. As it drew closer, it turned its long

BABELSTONE / CREATIVE COMMONS

TOP: Waverley Abbey dates back to the 12th century, but is not associated with any dragon legends. **ABOVE:** The 'hanging tree', a large yew at Waverley Abbey where the 'dragon' was seen to alight.



JULIA POOLEY

head to look at them, then turned and flew back the way it came. Nigel said the word "Zozo" was on the board when the creature appeared, although I am sceptical that this has any bearing on what was seen.

Darren said the wings were bat-like and was adamant that the thing was not a goose, swan, heron or cormorant. He thought he saw legs under the body, but could not be sure. He did not notice any eyes and as the creature did not open its mouth he saw no teeth. He said that it was pointless to try and use his camera as it was too dark. Baffled, he told me: "I've thought of every other option. It's not something normal that would have been around at night."

Julia Pooley said she was in the cloisters when she thought she heard children's voices calling "mum", and then the geese started making a noise. When they moved to the tree, she heard somebody say "Look at that!" Looking up, she saw what she thought was a bat circling and thought, "My God, that's the biggest bat I've ever seen!" The creature's wings, while appearing bat-like in structure, did not beat as fast as a bat's and moved more like those of a bird. The creature had a long tail and a long, narrow head. It looked black, but when caught in the moonlight, seemed silver in colour. Something was trailing beneath it, perhaps legs. It landed in the yew tree before taking off again, and a second creature flew by the ruins. She tried to take a picture on her phone, but all she got was a whitish blob. She said: "It had bat's wings rather than bird's wings. I've not seen anything like it. It looked podgy when in the tree, but long and slender in flight." Julia felt afraid of the creatures and felt that they could easily swoop down and kill her.

Luke Sturgess did not get a good look at the creatures, but noted that as one of them landed in the yew he could see a silvery eye shine as it looked at him.

Luke Gosling said that he was at the 'hanging tree', the old yew, engaging in table -turning when he thought he saw a bat. It soon resolved into a massive flying animal with a 10-foot (3m) wingspan, a long tail, a long neck and a pointed head. The creature flew into the tree. When he shone his torch at it he saw the tail with the arrow head point. He produced a sketch of the creature, showing its bat-like wings and long tail. He was convinced it was not any kind of bird.

I was impressed by the lack of exaggeration in the witness accounts: no gnashing teeth or flaming breath, just reports of what they saw. As Darren said, they were looking for ghosts – dragons were the last thing they expected to see. It should be pointed out, too, that there are no dragon legends associated with Waverley Abbey.

RETURN TO THE ABBEY

Jackie and I decided that we needed to meet up with the witnesses at the Abbey to try and recreate what the group had been doing on the night they saw the dragons. Not all of the 10 original witnesses could make it, but Darren, Julie, Dora and the two Lukes were able to join us at the Abbey just before sunset.

We saw a large heron fishing nearby, but Darren confirmed that the flying creatures he had seen looked nothing like it.

As darkness fell we had a Ouija board session. The planchette indicated that a dragon would manifest that night, but then degenerated into nonsense. Later, we tried table turning with a small, fold up table. Several of us lightly put our hands on the surface of the table. After a while it began to tremble and jerk; it would rise up on two legs, then one leg, and spin around. I failed to see how this was happening naturally as we were not gripping the sides but just gently laying our fingers upon it.

A little later I glanced at a treeline some 250 metres (820ft) away. This was not the same spot where Dora had seen the huge bat-winged creature. For a split second, I saw a black shape that seemed to fall into

LUKE GOSLING

TOP: Julia Pooley's sketch showimg the location of the group in relation to the tree and the ruins and the movements of the 'dragon'. **ABOVE CENTRE:** Richard Freeman with some of the witnesses. **ABOVE:** Luke Gosling's sketch showing the creature's long wings and arrow head-shaped tail.

COURTESY OF HBO

the trees from above. It was visible against the night sky and would have had to be of some size for me to see it from so far away. Shortly after, from the same general area, came a strange noise that I can best describe as a moaning growl. It was unlike any wild animal or livestock I have ever heard. I make no claim that this was a 'dragon' vocalising or that it was anything paranormal – I just couldn't identify it.

Whilst walking near the transept sometime later, I saw a small bright golden light about the size of a pea. It whizzed past my face about three feet (90cm) away, dragging a comet-like trail behind it. The sighting only lasted a couple of seconds. Nothing further happened that evening and we left at about midnight.

A NEW WINDOW AREA?

So what is going on at Waverley Abbey? There seem to be a number of phenomena: weird creatures, strange lights and possible poltergeist-like activity, all occurring in what may be a new 'window area'.

I think it is highly unlikely that the witnesses are lying: they seemed genuinely scared by what they had seen. And they had been looking for ghosts – dragons were the last thing on their minds.

But could they have mistaken large birds for supernatural creatures? Britain's largest native bird, the great bustard, can have a wingspan of 8ft 10in (2.7m) and weigh in at 46lb (21kg). They are found only in Wiltshire, where about 100 of them now live after a successful re-introduction programme.

Other large birds found in the UK include mute and whooper swans, golden and white tailed eagles, common cranes, grey herons, European eagle owls and Canada geese – but none of these have bat-like wings or long tails ending in arrow shaped points.

The HBO TV series *House of the Dragon*, the prequel to *Game of Thrones*, had been filming battle scenes in nearby Bourne Woods – only about half a mile from the Abbey – in 2023. The filming took place from August to October and had wrapped long before the sightings on 27 December. All the wyverns in *House of the Dragon* were a product of CGI and filming with blue screen, so they can't be used as an explanation for the sightings of dragons at Waverley Abbey. Flying, remote control dragons were not used in the production at all. Remote control pterosaurs, some life sized, have been built in the past, but in flight they look stiff and unreal; and they cannot land in trees, so we can discount this idea too. The filming of a fantasy series in the area is simply a coincidence, or at best a synchronicity.

REMOTE CONTROL DRAGONS WERE NOT USED IN THE PRODUCTION

THE GLOBAL MONSTER TEMPLATE

I don't believe that the dragons reported from around the world are flesh-and-blood animals in the way that crocodiles or anacondas are. If these sizeable creatures inhabited our world on a full-time basis they would be seen regularly, not to mention turning up on radar. They would be attacking aircraft, carrying people off and burning down cities. Whatever modern dragons are, they must be, for want of a better term, paranormal manifestations. Dragons are 'real' if you see one, but a different kind of real. They are part of what I call the 'global monster template' or GMT.

The GMT is a theory I developed in Thailand in 2000 while searching for giant snakes, or nagas, in the Mekong (see **FT166:30-35**). Basically, it became clear to me that every culture seems to have the same kinds of monster in its folklore. Dragons, hairy giants, monstrous dogs, giant birds, little people and monstrous cats turn up in stories from all over the world.

The origins of the GMT may lie in the mists of time, in our own evolutionary past. Several million years ago, our Australopithecine ancestors on the plains of East Africa had to struggle to survive. They were being preyed upon by, and were in competition with, various formidable creatures. Crocodiles and pythons ate them, as did big cats, African hunting dogs and large birds of prey such as eagles. They competed against other primates such as giant baboons and other races of hominids, some larger than them and some smaller. All of these creatures can be slotted nicely into a global monster template.

Maybe at the same time our ancestors began to have a concept of death and to grasp the fact that they too would one day die, something that could happen at the drop of a hat in such a deadly, predator-filled environment.

The concept of 'fossil memories' suggests that modern-day organisms, including humans, retain behaviour developed for dealing with predators and competitors from our ancient past. These behavioural quirks are passed down in our genes. As well as behaviour, latent fears are passed down too. We

SUPANUT ARUNOPRAYOTE / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

TOP: Some filming for the HBO series *House of the Dragon* took place in Bourne Woods, not far from Waverley Abbey, but the creatures were created using blue screen filming and CGI. **ABOVE:** A building in the shape of a naga, a giant crested serpent, in Vimarn Phaya Thean, Yasothon Province, Thailand.

CHRONICLE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Polish medium Franek Kluski was said to materialise creatures such as birds during séances.

associate darkness with evil; and this is due to a primordial fear of the night, when human vision is poor but the vision of primate-eating predators like leopards is acute. Our ancestors were at a disadvantage. The GMT is formed from the ancient terrors of our early African ancestors, passed down in our genes through millions of years, from generation to generation, through species to species. Even after three million years or more of evolution, these fears remain with us.

The Buddhist monks of Tibet, Nepal, and other parts of the Orient have long claimed to be able to create tangible objects with the power of their minds alone. Through deep concentration and mental discipline, it is said, they can create a kind of spirit being that is so convincing that it is often mistaken for a real person or animal. These 'mind beings' are called tulpas.

Westerners have experimented with them with varying degrees of success. One famous example would be the 'Philip' experiment carried out in Canada by a group called the Toronto Society for Psychical Research (**FT61:41-42, 64:61, 166:37, 212:59, 227:16, 302:69, 305:73, 351:18, 381:19, 351:18, 383:60-61, 427:19**). It was led by parapsychologist Dr AR George Owen and psychologist Dr Joel Whitton, and its aim was to create an artificial ghost using the mind power of participants. They gave their fake ghost a made-up background, but it seemed to break away from them and take on a life of its own – an artificial ghost created by the power of the group members' minds working together.

The medium Franek Kluski (1873-1943) was said to materialise creatures at séances; these included a bird like a huge nightjar, a massive black dog, a lion-like big cat and an ape-man. It was almost as if he was tapping into the global monster template.

I myself experimented in tulpa creation while in my student digs in Leeds in the 1990s, focusing on Atlach-Nacha, a fictional spider god created by the writer Clark Ashton Smith. The results were surprising, to say the least; but that's a story for another time.

If one mind, or a group of minds, in intense concentration can create a tulpa, what could the gestalt unconscious of mankind as a whole do? Rupert Sheldrake has postulated 'morphogenetic fields', through which evolutionary changes, behavioural patterns and information are shared at a subconscious level between members of a species; and when individuals pick up advantageous new behavioural traits, these are incorporated into the gestalt. He believed this was passed on by resonance, rather like the way that the energy wave from a plucked string on an instrument can resonate onto another string on the same instrument that has not been plucked. This works because part of the unplucked string has the potential to resonate at frequencies in common with the vibrating string: what is known as harmonic resonance. Sheldrake called his biological analogue 'morphic resonance'.[3]

This would seem to be the ideal way for gigantic shared thought forms to occur. Perhaps we should seek the origin of dragons and other monsters not in the outside world but in the jungles of our own minds and in the fossil memories handed down to us in our genes from our remote ancestors. UFOs and ghosts may stem from the confusing new lights seen in the night sky by our once jungle-dwelling primate ancestors and their own awakening to the nature of death. When these ancient horrors re-emerge they seem to take on palpable form for a time. Is this where some of our monster reports have their genesis?

OTHER REALITIES

There is, however, another possibility – a disquieting one. Namely, that monsters *are* real; not products of our minds, but fully independent and from another dimension. The idea of another reality that co-exists with ours is not new; once, it was called fairyland, and later the astral plane. Modern writers have many names for it. John Keel called it the 'super-spectrum', Jerome Clark the 'outer edge' and FW Holliday the 'goblin universe'. This 'elsewhere' is the postulated domain of just about every monster, phantom and weird entity ever reported.

In Islamic lore there is a race of dæmons known as *djinn*. *Djinn* were not one type of creature, but came in as many forms as there are animals in our dimension. They are made from 'smokeless fire', which could be translated in modern parlance as energy. They are said to inhabit our world, but are usually invisible to us, and we to them. Sometimes the veil slips and the *djinn* are seen.

Muslims have told me, quite independently of one another, that the main *djinn* forms are dragons and huge serpents, huge black dogs with glowing eyes, ape-like beasts, huge birds and massive black cats. In other words, they are straight out of the Global Monster Template.

Jerome Clark and D Scott Rogo point out an interesting factor of monster sightings in their book *Earth's Secret Inhabitants*. They note that most reported monsters resemble real animals, either living or extinct: "Odd caricatures of the types of life-forms that populate the Earth, these creatures represent the outcome of some evolutionary process paralleling life on this planet, but not exactly corresponding to it." In other words, the monsters come not from some other sphere, but a parallel reality within our own.

For now, the investigation into the dragons of Waverley Abbey is ongoing. It will be interesting to see where it leads. But I will leave you with the unsettling thought that dragons seem unsatisfied with lurking only in ancient legends and the pages of books; it seems they may be returning to the 'real' world.

I was very sad to hear that Darren Graham, one of the Waverley Abbey witnesses, has since died of stomach cancer, so I would like to dedicate this article to his memory.

NOTES

1 Linda S Godfrey, *American Monsters*, Penguin Random House, 2014.

2 Evens subsequently claimed the entity was behind all kinds of havoc in his life and recorded the story on the website *True Ghost Tales*. Zozo became something of an Internet meme for a while and even the basis for a horror film. The name is said to have first appeared in the 1816 book *The Infernal Dictionary* by Jacques Auguste Simon Collin de Plancy. As the modern story can be traced back to just one man, Darren Evens, it is almost certainly a hoax and Zozo has no more reality than other online legends like Slender Man, the Rake or the Dybbuk Box.

3 See www.sheldrake.org/research/morphic-resonance/introduction, and **FT37:4-21, 286:38-44, 448:46-50.**

RICHARD FREEMAN is a cryptozoologist, author, and zoological director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology. He is regular contributor to FT and the author of a number of books. His latest is *The Highest Strangeness* (CFZ Press 2024).

THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

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Alien attachments revisited

If you get an email from an alien civilisation, asks SD TUCKER, should you open the attachment?

On 7 June, a memo from outer space was successfully decoded by an unidentified father-and-daughter team known only as 'John' and 'Sarah'. The communication was written in a cipher which, once mathematically manipulated via computer, turned out to depict a simple image of five amino acids, the basic building-blocks of life on Earth.[1] Unfortunately, the message was not actually sent from Mars or Mercury, but from the European Space Agency's ExoMars Trace Gas Orbiter probe on 24 May last year in order to simulate the likely form a genuine ET message might take. Sixteen minutes later, it was successfully received by a number of participating radio-telescope arrays on Earth, including the Allen Telescope Array operated by SETI (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence). SETI helped organise the subsequent public competition to decipher the transmission, known as 'A Sign in Space', partly as an art project, and partly to help us develop methods for decoding any authentic extraterrestrial hellos we may receive in the future.

But was this a commendable attempt at citizen science, or something more dangerous and foolish? What if encouraging web users to engage with communications from the stars might end up inadvertently grooming them into having their computers hacked by phishers from another planet? It may seem an implausible idea, yet there are some brilliant minds out there who take such a prospect seriously. Alexey Turchin is a Russian transhumanist who has devoted much of his life to developing his dream of human immortality. However, humans won't be immortal for long if a murderous alien SkyNet manages to hijack our nukes via the Internet. As long ago as 2012, Turchin published an academic paper warning SETI how any ET attachment might just be a cunning vehicle for a Trojan Horse like Stuxnet, the covert malware used by US Intelligence to take over and wreck Iran's nuclear centrifuges in 2010.[2] Turchin cautions that an alien message offering us some great medical wonder, like a cure for cancer, might just be a tempting vehicle for "seed AI" to be implanted inside our PCs, an impossibly superior hostile intelligence against which we will have no defence. In such cases, the 'email' will probably really be some kind of radio-transmission signal, providing a hugely complex piece of code which then has to be manually inputted into a computer to execute. By doing so, naïve humans will think they are getting a cancer cure when they are really programming the future AI agent of their own destruction into existence.

Another paper, published in 2018 by researchers Michael Hippke, of Germany's Sonneburg Observatory, and John G Learned, of the University of Hawaii, theorises that any hostile ET email may not even need to contain viruses or seed AIs at all: it could just hold a socially destructive idea nestling openly within its main message-body.[3] This approach, they said, would be far "cheaper… compared to sending battleships." And yet, Hippke and Learned admit, the aliens may indeed be benign, their cancer cure genuine. They sensibly suggest that we should build a special prison on the Moon, incarcerate a non-weblinked computer inside and safely open the email there. Their paper further advises SETI to wire the jail up to "remote-controlled fusion bombs to terminate the experiment at any time", lest the wily device attempt to bribe its jailer into letting it go.

The FT hoax was presented with a straight face

But what if we can't wait that long? What if we are made an offer so irresistible we just have to open the attachment right away? 2024 marks the 20th anniversary of a prank played right here in *FT*. Issue 185 coincided with the 50th anniversary of D-Day and the sleights of hand used to disguise the Allies' true landing plans; it had a special 'D for Deception' theme and included an outright hoax article about a man who claimed to have been receiving alien porn from a dying galactic civilisation known only as 'The Senders'. This was Charles B Horn, billed as being CEO of The Horn Institute For Research Into Sender Theory (THIRST), but in fact the fictional creation of joker Paul Williams, supposed author of the non-existent 2004 book *Meetings With Remarkably Strange Men*. Laid out as an interview between Horn and Williams, the article explained how the entire SETI project had been a waste of time and perhaps even a Deep State "tool for disinformational propaganda" meant to distract mankind from the true nature of alien contact – not boring radio-transmissions of amino acids, but "eye-grabbing" spam emails "deploying the promise of highly-charged sexual activity" with beings from another world.

Beginning in January 2003, Horn noticed his inbox was being repeatedly penetrated by mysterious mailings promising him certain images described as being "FINGER LICKIN' GOOD! UUUMMMMM!" Eventually, the communications built up to "a frenzied searing climax of imagery" promising such explicit wonders as "Free Sick Anal XXX Sluts!", while others "even promised to increase my penis size overnight!" After thinking long and hard, Professor Horn concluded that the emails were perverted aliens who wished to tempt mankind into engaging in "some kind of breeding activity" to resurrect their dying race.

Users of primitive dial-up e-mail services from the early-2000s may recall how poor spam-filters of the day were, easily allowing spammers to clog your in-box with unwanted offers simply by deliberately mis-typing their messages to promise users access to obscene wonders like "m0nStEr CoCkS klawqoei". These Horn showed to his equally fictional colleague William Stone, Professor of Comparative Linguistics at the University of Austin, Texas. Stone concluded these intentional QWERTYUIOP typos represented degradation in quality of The Senders' messages over time, as their civilisation and its technology slowly faded away and died due to some unknown cosmic catastrophe.

The hoax was presented with a completely straight face, and even came with a link to a fake website, www.charlesbhorn.com. As a result, several readers took the whole thing seriously, leading to some outraged missives in the letters pages of FT187.

We should all hope that SETI has decent anti-virus protection: it would be a tragedy of truly cosmic proportions if the real reason the world ended was just because some bored astronomer couldn't resist the prospect of seeing precisely how hairy Chewbacca's balls were.

NOTES

1 www.seti.org/decoding-message-sign-space-year-long-journey

2 https://philpapers.org/rec/TURTRC

3 https://arxiv.org/pdf/1802.02180

SD TUCKER is an FT regular.

The great golf ball mystery

ANDY OWENS finds that mysteriously appearing golf balls are baffling residents from Barming in Kent to Palmyra in Pennsylvania...

KMG / SWNS

ABOVE: The fed-up residents of Trellyn Close in Barming, Kent, were subjected to a barrage of golf balls in 2019.

While browsing through Darren Mann's excellent fortean website Paranormal Database, I came across an entry entitled 'Raining Golf Balls' which recounts how residents of Slough, Berkshire, had been finding golf balls in their gardens, despite them being miles away from any golf courses. Darren told me it was based on a short news item in **FT191:9**, with its original source being the *Slough and South Bucks Express*, 6 May 2004, recounting how residents of Huntercombe Lane North, Burnham, Slough, had been baffled by the mystery.

Ron Greer said he had found 20 or 30 golf balls in his garden each year between 2001 and 2004. His neighbour Richard Bayliss said: "Some weeks you get none and some weeks you get half a dozen." [1] I did an Internet search to see if the matter was ever resolved and made a media enquiry, though no answer was forthcoming – but I also found instances of golf balls mysteriously appearing in other locations.

A report on the website Golfmagic.com, (originally reported in the *Dorking Advertiser* in 2013) entitled "The Great Surrey Golf Ball Mystery", tells how Jeff Davies had found an incredible 600 golf balls at Coombe Farm in Dorking, Surrey.

Mr Davies said: "I have lived here for 30 years, and I know the area very well. It is particularly mystifying as they [the golf balls] are always found in the same small area with new ones arriving every week. I walk in a lot of other places around here and I don't see them anywhere else. Yet the concentration and the amount here is incredible and they're all practically brand new. I pick them all up and stuff them in my pockets but when I go back a few days later, there are more there.

"Why are there so many of them? And where are they coming from?"

"The nearest golf course is over three miles away, and there is absolutely no chance of it being someone going there to practise golf as it is so isolated. The only thing I can think of is that it's birds thinking they are eggs, picking them up from golf courses, and bringing them back to their rookeries. I've never seen one drop onto the ground, and I wish I had because that would solve the mystery.

"There's something very strange going on. I'm hoping someone will be able to throw light on this for me because it is an absolute mystery." [2]

In December 2013, Graham and Josephine Todd, of Richmond Road, Beddington (in the London suburb of Sutton) found nine golf balls in their garden in a month, even though the nearest golf course at Mitcham is over three miles away. Mr Todd said: "It's mysterious. If it was an animal, you would think it would be just dropped on the lawn, but some of them are half-buried. All you see is a little white dome sticking out of the ground. There are no teeth marks on them and they're brand new, so we don't know where they're coming from."

Interviewed again in January 2014, the Todds said the golf balls had been appearing overnight for the last month. Mr Todd said: "I'll just be walking around the garden and then, oh, there's another golf ball."

Initially, it was just the couple's garden, but now neighbours had been finding them too. One neighbour said she had found one in her garden, and another neighbour found one in his flowerpots.

"Why so many of them and where are they coming from? I've tried to think about it, but I haven't got a clue. It is a mystery. Personally, I've got no idea," Mr Todd concluded. [3]

Across the pond next, where in 2020 the *LebTown News* reported on a similar case from Palmyra in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania.

Tom Knapp wrote: "It's like the lovechild of Arnold Palmer and the Easter Bunny has been living secretly in Palmyra for the last two years. If not, then who has been leaving golf balls on the streets, lots, and lawns of the town?"

"I have no idea. It's been an ongoing thing," said Scott Rhine, who works in a local car dealership. He told how golf balls started appearing on the car lot and surrounding streets, up to two years ago – and it hadn't stopped.

"There's been no damage," he said. "It's not an issue, it's not a problem with vandalism. They just randomly appear."

The balls appeared overnight and were there when employees arrived in the morning. There were 31 balls scattered around the dealership one morning, he said. The day before, there were 59. Some mornings there were only three or four balls to be found. The most he'd found in one day was 65.

"It's become a joke,' he said. "Every morning, we go for a walk to look for them."

Nothing had been caught on the dealership's surveillance cameras to show who had been putting the golf balls there, and Mr Rhine noted that there weren't any golf courses or driving ranges close by.

It had been going on long enough that Rhine posted a message about it on the Palmyra Facebook group.

"We got a lot of responses," he said. "It's just all over Palmyra. It's a phenomenon."

Balls have also turned up in surrounding areas including Cherry, Maple, Forge and Prince Streets, Ridge Road, West Main Street and

FAR LEFT: Graham Todd of Beddington with a small sample of his balls. **LEFT**: Scott Rhine's car dealership in Palmyra, PA, saw a plague of mystery golf balls in 2020.

Horseshoe Pike.

Megan Escobar wrote: "We get golf balls in our yard over on the other side of town, on Lingle Avenue. It's so strange!"

Nichole Melissa added: "I live on West Cherry down by the cemetery. They are in our yard ALL the time! Where are they coming from?!?!"

"All over in town," said Tracy Crosson. "Every time we take a walk, my dog comes home with two in his mouth."

"WTH is this?!?" asked Keith Reh, who said the phenomenon could be explained "once or twice… perhaps a bored group of teens; this is getting worrisome considering there are houses right behind the dealership… vandalism might be next."

"But where does one get so many golf balls to play this prank?" asked Arissa Farr May.

"OK, I'm camping out," said Shane Sutherly. "Mystery needs solving."

Rhine said: "If the phenomenon stopped, I'd be upset. I'm getting free golf balls!"

However, he said he would like to see the mystery solved someday. "Everybody is to that point," he said. "It's not damaging anything, so far as the business goes, we really don't care. But we'd love to know where they're coming from."

A local official said the police were aware of the situation, but they hadn't investigated because no one had complained about it or reported it as a crime. [4]

Back to Blighty for the next case, in which residents of a village near Maidstone in Kent were not only finding golf balls, but sometimes being hit by them – and still had no idea where they were coming from.

Between May and August 2019, residents of Trellyn Close in Barming, reported how golf balls had hit people in their gardens, narrowly missed children and smashed a greenhouse roof. But nobody was able to trace the person or group responsible. Malcolm Austin, 65, said the village lived in fear and his wife had been hit twice and his car dented. "Our lives have been disrupted by some idiot," the grandfather told the *Maidstone Messenger*.

The attacks began in May 2019. Kent Police said they were making house-to-house inquiries in the village.

Resident Lynsey Holmewood wrote online, appealing to the perpetrators: "Enough now! Whoever over the back of Trellyn Close is launching golf balls over needs to stop." [5]

In a later report for the same newspaper, dated August 2019, a police spokesman said: "Our officers have identified an area where the golf balls are likely to have been struck from and, at this stage, we have no reason to believe there is any malicious intent." [6]

Interviewed by a local TV news team, Mr Austin said he received a letter from Kent Police saying that the case is now closed. He said: "No one has been out to see us. The local police officer seems to be non-existent. Basically, we're pulling our hair out." [7]

In the *Smithsonian Magazine*, Sarah Zielinski's article "Strange Skies" described Cynthia Barnett's book *Rain: A Natural and Cultural History* (Crown, 2016), which discusses falls of fish and frogs from the sky and briefly mentions how reports were chronicled by Charles Fort. Barnett herself "even found one account of a rain of golf balls in Florida – potentially linked to a waterspout crossing over a golf course." [8] However, surely this would be a one-off or very occasional occurrence and would not account for regular, recurring incidents.

Rangers in the Joshua Tree National Park found literally thousands of golf balls, but eventually they tracked down Douglas Jones of La Quinta, who confessed immediately. He said he had been throwing golf balls from his car window as a way of "honouring dead golfers". [9]

A case of vanishing, rather than appearing, golf balls in the US was solved when a family of fox cubs was filmed stealing them, [10] and after golf balls were discovered near Port Gaverne in Cornwall, people blamed seagulls for taking the balls from golf courses five miles away, thinking they were eggs, then dropping them on the shore or in the sea when they couldn't crack them open. [11]

Similarly, a user on Reddit responded to the *The Gus and Eddy Podcast*, after the two hosts had been finding golf balls in their gardens, suggesting the mystery could be explained by squirrels stealing them from golf courses and dropping them on people's properties.

The same user also offered another explanation: that golf balls, especially the older ones that were found half-buried, had been in the ground for years, and were gradually pushed to the surface through a combination of erosion and weather conditions. This is an intriguing suggestion, but doesn't explain how they got there in the first place. [12]

I have been unable to locate any follow-up reports about whether any of the cases outlined above are still ongoing, or if any of them were ever solved. I submitted an FoI request to Kent Police regarding the flying golf balls of Trellyn Close in Maidstone, and have received an acknowledgement, but no reply as yet.

So, I'll end with an appeal to *FT* readers: does anyone know of any other reports of golf balls or other similar objects mysteriously appearing; and does anyone know of an explanation in any such cases?

NOTES

1 "Phantom Golfer", **FT191:9**.

2 www.golfmagic.com/news/golf-news/the-great-surrey-golf-ball-mystery/14803

3 www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/10971684.beddington-neighbours-left-baffled-by-invasion-of-mystery-golf-balls/

4 https://lebtown.com/2020/07/02/2-years-of-random-palmyra-golf-balls-and-no-answer-to-mystery-in-sight/

5 www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/kent-villagers-tormented-by-mystery-attacker-pelting-homes-with-golf-balls-a4203836.html

6 www.kentonline.co.uk/maidstone/news/has-golf-ball-mystery-been-solved-209760/

7 www.dailymotion.com/video/x86cyw5

8 www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/strange-rain-why-fish-frogs-and-golf-balls-fall-skies-180956527/

9 www.nbclosangeles.com/news/sports/golf-ball-mystery-solved-at-joshua-tree/1861262/

10 www.youtube.com/watch?v=401iSG0h7ys

11 www.cornishrocktors.com/the-mystery-of-the-port-gaverne-golf-balls/

12 www.reddit.com/r/GusAndEddy/comments/jvhrfz/a_hypothesis_regarding_the_incident_of_the/

ANDY OWENS investigates reports of mysterious happenings and writes the blog Spooky Vocation (In Search of Ghosts and Stranger Things). His books include *Yorkshire Stories of the Supernatural* (1999), *The Police and the Paranormal* (2011) and *Ghosts* (2021). Details at owensandy.com

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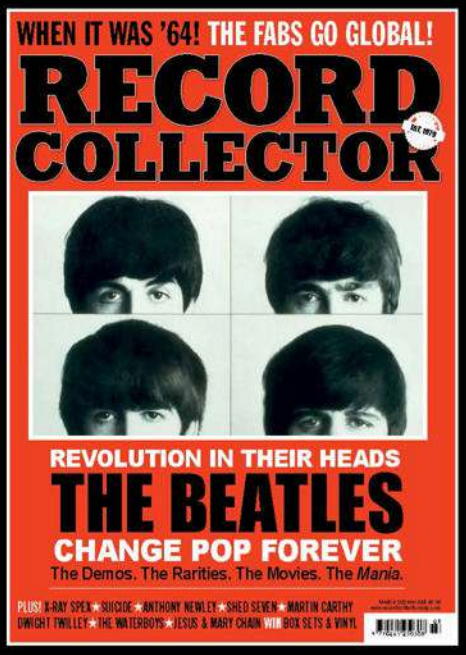
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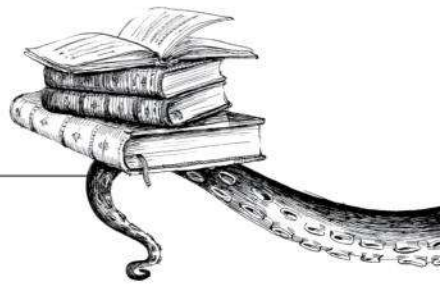


Where do creative ideas come from?

Throughout history people have found a variety of fascinating explanations for their artistic inspiration. But perhaps the answer actually lies in the future, says **Charles Foster**, through precognition

From Nowhere

Artists, Writers and the Precognitive Imagination

Eric Wargo

Anomalist Books 2024

Pb, 408pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781949501339

"At the deepest level," wrote JF Martel, "artists have always worked by the light of stars yet unborn." *From Nowhere* examines this thesis.

Wargo has grappled with precognition before – notably in his celebrated book *Time Loops* (2018) – but here he explores (by looking at what precognitive might signify in the humanities), what precognition might mean for meaning itself.

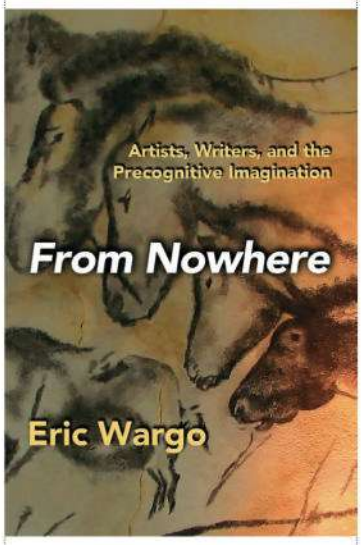
Precognition, Wargo argued in *Time Loops*, is part of ordinary cognition, and so – he contends in *From Nowhere* – it is not surprising that it forms part of artistic inspiration too.

Those contentions are seen today as audacious or heretical. But it is only since the Enlightenment that causation has been seen as plodding drearily in one direction, from the past, via the present, to the future, and that accordingly anything that looks like creativity must just be a rearrangement of old ideas. Before the Enlightenment there were many theories of creativity that did far more justice to our experience of creativity – to the "Where on Earth did that come from?" feeling that most of us know.

Those Upper Palaeolithic artists (some of the finest there have ever been), who painted animals and therianthropes on cave walls, were probably painting what they had seen in trances, dreams or visions. The Muses gave inspiration to their chosen Greeks. Mediæval and Renaissance artists gave God the credit for their works. And though the Enlightenment insisted that all this was unscientific gibberish, the artists themselves knew better, and clung to some iteration of the old understanding.

"Kubla Khan" and *Frankenstein* came in dreams, Virginia Woolf, walking round Tavistock Square, received the plot of *To the Lighthouse* in "a great, apparently involuntary, rush", and the young Indian mathematician, Srinivasan Ramanujan, saw his mathematical insights as the gifts of his family goddess, Namagiri Thayar.

What artists are really doing, thinks Wargo, is eavesdropping



on their own futures. This can't be proved, as Wargo concedes. Precognitive experiences tend to be spontaneous and unpredictable, which makes them hard to study using traditional scientific methods. But Wargo calls many witnesses, hoping that their number, their cogency and the improbability of fabrication or coincidence will make his case.

We hear from Michael Rolando Richards, who died on 9/11, and

What artists are really doing, thinks Wargo, is eavesdropping on their own futures

whose 1999 sculpture "Tar Baby v St Sebastian", shows his body pierced by a host of aeroplanes; from Edgar Allan Poe who, 46 years before the survivors of a shipwreck survived by killing and drinking the blood of a cabin boy called Richard Parker, wrote *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* of Nantucket, featuring the survival of four shipwrecked sailors who killed and ate their cabin boy – one Richard Parker; from Mark Twain, whose dream of his dead brother lying, dressed in Twain's own suit, in the only metal coffin in the morgue, came true; and from the trapped Pennsylvania coal miners, accompanied in the darkness by Pope John XXIII, who, when released, were wheeled into a hospital room to be greeted by a big, smiling picture of the Pope.

As evidence, these accounts are rather underwhelming, for they need to be balanced by all the thoughts, dreams and visions that do not come true. But they are powerfully bolstered by Wargo's account of how precognition might happen.

Einstein, writing to the family of his recently dead friend, Michele Besso, declared that "People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion."

Yet to this day, few scientists seem to believe in physics, and their persistence is stubborn and embarrassing.

Wargo is up to date, acknowledging that space and time are part of the same continuum, and seeing objects inside that continuum as four-dimensional worm-like forms, twisting their way through, rather than moving in a straight line, and capable of looping back as well as forwards.

Or, if you prefer, space-time itself can bend, bringing two points, distant in time and space, into contact – via, appropriately, the wormholes beloved of quantum physics. When something from the future bursts out of a wormhole as you're drinking tea in the kitchen, wouldn't you expect to have the "out of nowhere" sensation described by those inspired writers?

Brains, suggests Wargo, are "information tunnels across time", which can bring news about our future just as they can help to retrieve data about our past.

There is growing experimental evidence that this might be the case – evidence, for instance, that one half of a split laser beam can influence the past of its twin; evidence that our blood flow, our eye movements and our brain waves may know things that have yet to happen to us; evidence that we will recall a word more accurately if, unknown to us at the time of the recall, that word will be followed in the test by an image (for instance an erotic image) that we wish to see.

Wargo is an acute, shrewd, brave and brilliantly articulate expositor of these very natural supernaturalisms.

His book is profoundly important – even if only 10 per cent of it is right. I suspect a lot more than that is. In 50 years time, I predict (and this isn't my precognition speaking), that his account of reality and creativity will be regarded as canonical.

★★★★★

London's spooky realm

Ian Simmons discovers the British Museum is seething with unquiet spirits and even gods

Ghosts of the British Museum

A True Story of Colonial Loot and Restless Objects

Noah Angell

Monoray 2024

Hb, 256pp, £20, ISBN 9781800961340

This is quite unlike any other ghost book you are likely to come across. While, yes, there are certainly conventional(ish) ghost stories here, there is a lot more to this relatively slim book than that.

A hugely important strand here is a reckoning with Britain's ugly

history of colonial exploitation that ripped many of the museum's items from their cultural context and turned them into imperial trophies, 99 per cent of which are not on display but languish in the mysterious (and, quite frankly, slightly alarming, if Angell is to be believed) "storage" below the museum. Decolonisation is now a hugely important agenda in museums, and rightly so, and this book makes an important contribution to this, although, as a veteran museum curator, I do not go along with all Angell's conclusions and find that his polemic becomes distractingly strident in later chapters.

But the ghosts… Angell has spent years talking to museum staff about their personal experience of the British Museum's supernatural denizens and following this up with psychic investigators, and the work has paid off. Even if half of this is true, the Museum is London's most haunted building, and quite possibly Britain's.

Angell finds a museum seething with unquiet spirits and a staff who accept this as part of life there. Much of the activity he attributes to entities attached to looted objects, and he finds that there are not only ghosts, but powerful spirits, and even gods, trapped within those Bloomsbury walls. Some seem to have come to terms with their fate and settled into new roles in the museum, others are angry and literally lash out at the unwary. A few attract new worshippers who leave offerings, bringing to mind the strange cults and possessed statues of China Mieville's *Kraken*.

Dr John Dee's scrying stone and tablets sit quietly at the centre of it all. There are more conventional ghosts too: recent suicides haunt the Sutton Hoo and Enlightenment galleries, and a deceased Assyriologist used to inhabit the cuneiform tablet store until he was laid by an impromptu curatorial séance.

Then there's storage, a fantastical realm beneath the museum that makes the Indiana Jones warehouse look like a broom cupboard. A spooky realm of doors and endless branching corridors, it is alleged to contain a complete and functioning secret Ethiopian monastery (it does, sort of), a morgue for mummies, a small room containing three headless bodies in stone sarcophagi that no one knows anything about, not even how they got there, and even, once, a shooting range; and that is just scraping the surface.

Even if the decolonisation aspect isn't to your taste, this is an extraordinary and fascinating look at one of Britain's strangest and most venerable institutions that leaves you wondering what's going on in all the other museums.

★★★★

Occult Germany

Old Gods, Mystics and Magicians

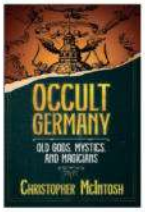
Christopher McIntosh

Inner Traditions 2024

Pb, 264pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781644117347

According to the Roman historian Tacitus, author of *Germania*, the Teutonic peoples were named after their ancient pagan sky-god Teut; with the "T" later transliterated into a "D", we get the modern domestic name for the country of *Deutschland*. According to British-born (but German-resident) scholar Christopher McIntosh, in this interesting new history of the esoteric ways of his adopted land, this shows the country's very name itself contains innate spiritual implications, meaning something like "Sky-God-Land".

How many modern-day Germans know this, though? McIntosh writes: "Over centuries, the



Germans have been subjected to a campaign of indoctrination seeking to teach them to disparage their own mythology" dating right back to the days of the Emperor Charlemagne, who forced his pagan subjects to convert to Christianity on pain of death. In the post-WWII era, meanwhile, the enthusiasm of leading Nazis like Himmler for the myths of the Old Ways led to the supernatural being subsequently condemned, repressed and ignored – at least officially.

But Germany is the land of Doctor Faustus and Christian Rosenkreuz, Wotan and his Wild Hunt, and such powerful imaginative forces cannot be bottled up forever. McIntosh's main thesis is that Germany is *über alles* the land of alchemy, something which may appear to have since been replaced by the less romantic practice of chemistry in a process of what leading German sociologist Max Weber called "disenchantment of the world". Yet this is just a surface illusion: alchemy's principles seeped into the *weltanschauung* of the nation's innumerable later mystics and seers, and its seeds lie hidden within Germany's very soil itself, which can be transformed from mundane base matter into shining spiritual gold, given the correct alchemically enlightened eye.

Structured in several thematic chapters, not chronologically, upon subjects like Places of Power, Seers and Somnambulists, and Mystics, Magicians and Witches, the main criticism you could make of this text is that, by necessity, its coverage of most of the individuals and specific topics concerned is fairly brief; you only get a page or paragraph or two about colossal figures like Agrippa, Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen *et al*, when they really deserve whole chapters.

This is a broad overview, then, not a truly in-depth one: readers genuinely intrigued by, say, the story of *The Seeress of Prevorst* will really have to seek out Justinus Kerner's full book of that name about her. But what can the author do? Given limits of space, this is as good as any such book could reasonably be: well-organised, well-illustrated, well-produced. As with so many occult tracts, however, it might best be viewed as a potential springboard to a much longer and more twisting journey, like that enjoyed by Goethe's Wilhelm Meister. A good initiation into the topic.

SD Tucker

★★★★

Sorcerers of Stone

Architects of the Three Ages

Camille M Sauvé

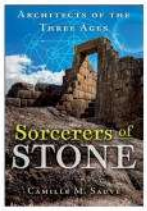
Bear & Co 2024

Pb, 304pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781591435082

To the Inka and their descendants a *huaca* is a site, natural or man-made, that has intrinsic spiritual power; they are legion within the Sacred Valley of Peru. Camille Sauvé, a citizen of Cusco, likes nothing more of a bright afternoon than to visit her local *wakas* (sic) and especially the "Moon Temple" cave system in the Inka ruins of Sacsayhuaman (delightfully close to sexy-woman when pronounced by Anglophones), there to experience "after some hours" a tingling.

Built on this awakaning (sic) she fabricates her airy megalithic castles using *all* the usual places, both real and imaginary – Machu Picchu, Stonehenge, Carnac, Easter Island, the Pyramids alongside Atlantis, Lemuria and assorted exo-planets; and people – Rudolf Steiner, Madame Blavatsky

(bless her) and Graham Hancock plus a host of "wisdom-keepers" including local father and son researchers Alfredo and Jesús Gamarra. One delight of the book is that Inka-Killke sites (and Tiwanaku in Bolivia), places generally quite overlooked in



alternative archæology, are given their deserved huacan? place amongst the more commonly abused sites.

Sauvé wonders for most of the book how ancient (code for primitive) peoples could manipulate huge blocks of masonry with precision. How could they have been transported, shaped (moulded and smoothed) and then assembled so precisely? Acoustic levitation by Tibetan brass bands, the pouring of artificial liquid rocks into moulds or even vitrification of limestones take on a patina of sanity when compared to suggestions of giant proto-human builders on an Earth smaller, denser and far hotter than present levitating the megaliths by telekinesis. She partially justifies this suggestion with the statement "the Bible begins with 'In the beginning was the word.'" St John's is not even the first gospel, let alone the beginning of the Bible! Theology is not alone to be given an idiosyncratic cavalier gloss as she makes much account of science and "new discoveries" but her understanding of these (much is fringe or now long superseded) is so confused and her factual errors so blatant and manifold they are more than enough to rip the heart out of any mainstream natural scientist, especially geologists.

However, there are 27 excellent colour plates, mostly from the Andes, accompanied by almost 100 grainy monochrome photographs pared (sic) by terse captions. Indeed, most of these pan-global (but no Malta) images make up a final, essentially text-free, so silent, 40-page coda. It is a reminder that watching (similar-minded) Brien Foerster's video *Megaliths of Peru* (with the sound muted so as to not move the stones) gives a far more rewarding view of Inka stonework, the result of much mediæval human sweat.

Rob Ixer

★★

Rat City

Overcrowding and Urban Derangement in the Rodent Universes of John B Calhoun

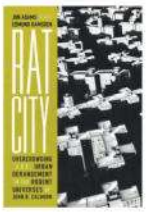
Jon Adams & Edmund Ramsden

Melville House 2024

Hb, 384pp, £30, ISBN 9781685890995

Humans rather expect rats as an unavoidable part of the worlds we have made for ourselves. Tackling that presence, therefore, has been a major part of our thinking about them and ourselves. Near the top of any list of those who have committed themselves to this question in the last century must be John B Calhoun, an American ecologist at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

This excellent book charts Calhoun's fascinating career, from an interest in population densities to a complex examination of habitation, environment, architecture and behaviour that led to wide-scale interdisciplinary collaboration and discussion



with colleagues dubbed the "space cadets".

Biography scarcely does it justice. It is not just that Calhoun's research took him through some of the major intellectual discussions in science over the 20th century, including the identification of stress responses, sociobiology, views of animal social life and culture that prioritise the particular role of the gene, and conceptual links between individual choice and group behaviour. He was at the heart of how this played out in social and administrative responses to such questions, all while gaining ever deeper knowledge of rats' life and ecology. He was, cautiously but clearly, intimating a species equivalence with humans when he wrote of the "sociology" of rats.

Calhoun tried to model environments in which to study wild rat behaviour, as opposed to that of the genetically homogeneous and pacific lab rats.

Looking at rats becomes a way of looking at ourselves, however. Calhoun was examining how population density affected the rats, experimenting with both over- and under-crowding as a means of controlling numbers. Considering the environment's effect on population density and behaviour, Calhoun's researches returned repeatedly to the construction of functioning large-scale living communities, also a pressing concern for humans.

Many human uses of this research are depressingly predictable, although offering useful material to forteans, and the book casts much light on political engagement with science, from proposals for eugenicist population control and social programming in town planning to military resistance to acknowledging that these questions had a social base.

The US Government eventually abandoned its engagement with Calhoun's work, turning instead to incarceration as its social panacea.

Later in life, Calhoun felt the most sympathetic treatment of his later research was in the children's book *Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*.

That kind of surprising point of contact and insight recurs throughout the book, almost like seeing the 20th century from the perspective of a rat burrow. It gets everywhere.

Paul Cowdell

★★★★

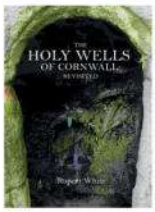
The Holy Wells of Cornwall: Revisited

Rupert White

Antenna 2024

Pb, 332pp, £12, ISBN 9798326844187

This book takes you to 60 sacred wells, about a third of those known to have existed in Cornwall, with photographs and reports of their present state: so far, so familiar, and White's book can be compared with those by Paul Broadhurst, Cheryl Straffon and Phil Cope.



But he breaks new ground by carefully researching how these sites have changed.

For the last three centuries the Cornish have been pulling down or building their holy wells, and what the pilgrim sees nowadays may bear little resemblance to what was there in the Middle Ages – if anything.

Indestructible and resistant to reworking, granite was the lithic Lego of 18th-century romantic gardeners and hopeful Anglo-Catholics.

At Trelill and Padstow mediæval arches were created by remounting Tudor blocks at right angles. At St Clether the enterprising Baring-Gould pieced piles of stones into a well-chapel, as if working on a three-dimensional jigsaw. Bits of discarded church imparted ecclesiastical dignity to wells at Veryan and St Morgan. At St Keyne the well, more famous for its marital superstition than its patron saint, was rebuilt as a replica of Linkinhorne down the road, because that was more picturesque.

"Holy well" is an elastic term. Half of the sites were centres of cult in the Middle Ages, 30 per cent continue that tradition post-Reformation with varying degrees of self-deception, and 20 per cent are culturally significant but not consecrated.

Cornwall was densely populated, both above and below ground. Careless miners cut off the water supply to wells at St Agnes and Perranzabuloe, while those at Bodmin and St Ives were municipal sources until the arrival of mains water liberated them to become holy.

No one owns Cornish holy wells, certainly not the Church. Their care (often indistinguishable from their destruction) is in the hands of local volunteers, neo-Pagans, maverick vicars and the Old Cornwall Societies. So the wells speak to today's concerns, not yesterday's: they had been Catholic shrines, then spas, then places of folk healing and divination, and now they are sites to connect with the spirit of the Earth.

The Cornish love dunking things in holy water – pins, dolls and each other, especially when mad. They will queue up to abseil down a sheer cliff in honour of a Victorian folly.

At Madron and Sancreed they have tied so many rags to the overhanging trees that cloutie wars break out every time someone organises a tidy-up: here the Pagans, who began as a counter-cultural movement, now take on the supervisory role of a priesthood.

For anyone interested in social memory, this book is a treasure trove.

Jeremy Harte

★★★★

D&D's impact on the world

James Holloway explores two essential books covering 50 years of the most influential role-playing game in history

Playing at the World 2nd edn

Volume 1: The Invention of Dungeons and Dragons

Jon Peterson

MIT Press 2024

Pb, 384pp, £27, ISBN 9780262548779

Fifty Years of Dungeons and Dragons

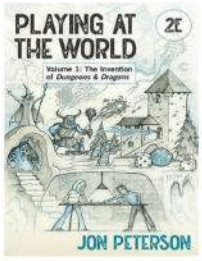
Exploring The Mysteries of Time and Space

Eds. Premeet Sidhu, Marcus Carter & José P Zagal

MIT Press 2024

Pb, 372pp, £33, ISBN 9780262547604

The 40th anniversary of *Dungeons and Dragons* in 2014 passed relatively unmarked, by both academia and the general public. The



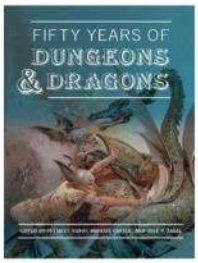
first edition of Jon Peterson's *Playing at the World*, released in 2012, was a niche text, beloved of historians of gaming and nostalgic *D&D* nerds; in it, Peterson argued for the importance of his subject by pointing out *D&D*'s influence on digital games.

In other words, it's been a big 10 years for the biggest name in role-playing games. Actual-play shows, Covid lockdown, a Hollywood movie and Gen-X nostalgia have catapulted *D&D* to perhaps its greatest cultural prominence ever. And with the 50th anniversary of its release falling this year, MIT Press has a pair of new volumes dealing with the game's history and impact.

The new edition of *Playing at the World*, a comprehensive history not just of *D&D* but of the games that inspired it, has been split into two volumes. The original began the story of the game's invention and then paused in the middle for an analysis of the specific origins of many of *D&D*'s settings, mechanics and other elements. The middle section has now been split off into a second book, leaving the first volume as a history of the creation of the game and the people and culture that produced it.

Peterson's thorough reconstruction of the era, drawing on fanzines, correspondence and creators' drafts and notes, is especially important because legal disputes over the creation of *D&D* mean that the accounts of the participants themselves are conflicting and incomplete. Most stories of *D&D*'s creation amount to no more than "Gary Gygax created *D&D*" or "Dave Arneson created *D&D* and Gygax took the credit." Peterson's research reveals the much more complex reality that underlies these stories.

Perhaps the most striking thing about this readable history is the way in which Peterson brings to life the culture of hobbyist clubs that birthed the role-playing game. Gygax and his fellow wargaming enthusiasts look like any group of geeks then or now: delivering fanzine updates months late, staying up too late playing games, periodically swearing off the hobby and promising that they'll focus on their jobs, and so on. This ramshackle network of amateurs produced a creative ferment that would completely change how we think about games, and it makes compelling reading.



Although Premeet Sidhu, Marcus Carter and José P Zagal's *Fifty Years of Dungeons and Dragons* does contain some essays on the history of the game – including an article by Peterson on critical early concepts in the game and another by Tony A Rowe and Zach Howard on the career of *Basic D&D* creator J Eric Holmes – it isn't primarily a historical work; its chapters cover a wide range of different topics.

These include game design, represented by articles like Evan Torner's look at the effects of combat systems, as well as the way in which the game's handling of topics such as religion and race has changed over time. Adrian Hermann's piece on religion in *D&D*, for instance, argues that the game's idiosyncratic "playable polytheism" has influenced the portrayal of religion throughout the fantasy genre.

The treatment of race and culture in role-playing games in general and *D&D* in particular is one of the most contentious issues in the gaming community, and it's no surprise that this topic turns up in several articles, ranging from conceptual overviews like Amanda Cole and Emily Saidel's essay to case studies like Kellynn Wee's look at *D&D* in Singapore and more personal writings like those from Aaron Trammell, Antero Garcia and Daniel Heath Justice.

Other topics covered include changing play cultures, the legal issues surrounding the Open Game Licence, brief reflections from game designers, *D&D*'s digital games, the influence of the game on speculative fiction, and more. Gary Alan Fine, the sociologist whose 1983 *Shared Fantasy* was probably the first significant academic study of RPGs, writes one piece and contributes to another.

Like any collection of articles loosely organised around a central topic, *Fifty Years of Dungeons and Dragons* has at least something to appeal to anyone interested in game history, game studies or even just the impact of games on popular culture.

If you're interested in the ways in which hobbyist culture can have a lasting impact on the world, *Fifty Years* is well worth a look and *Playing at the World* is essential.

Peterson ★★★★★
Sidhu *et al* ★★★★

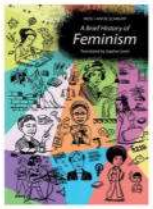
A Brief History of Feminism

Patu & Antje Schrupp

MIT Press 2024

Pb, 80pp, £15.99, ISBN 9780262037112

Is feminism fortean? All political movements have their fortean aspects, as SD Tucker demonstrates in his Strange Statesmen (sic) articles. Because women were excluded from public life for generations, the ways they made their voices heard, and gained authority, were sometimes very fortean indeed. Step forward some notable women whose stories are as



likely to appear in the pages of FT as in this slender comic book.

Want the Church to take notice? Give them a few revelations. In the 13th century, Wilhelmina of Milan proclaimed herself to be the female incarnation of God, a pronouncement that didn't end well for her number one follower and successor, Mayfreda. The ecstatic visionary St Teresa of Avila takes on the Catholic Church to demand that nunneries should have their own rules.

Women were central to the rise of the Spiritualist movement. Victoria Woodhull was a suffragist, Spiritualist and advisor to the great and the good – and (arguably) the first woman to stand for president of the United States.

In the 20th century, Shulamith Firestone envisioned a future where women are freed from their reproductive function. Babies are grown outside the womb and the biological family no longer exists. Utopia or dystopia? That may depend on which side of the gender divide you are on.

Originally written in German, this book provides a broad overview of European feminist activity as well as the perspectives more commonly taught to gender studies students in the UK. Much space is given over to the important issue of intersectionality: that individual women may experience different levels of oppression and discrimination because of factors such as ethnicity, social class and motherhood.

This is a great introduction to feminism in the early 21st century. Skip through for forteana, or read it all to see why this is such an important political movement.

Paula Dempsey
★★★★

ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS AND GOT LOST DOWN THE BACK OF SOFA...

The Rendlesham Forest UFO Mystery

George Wingfield

Squeeze Press/Wooden Books, 2022

Pb, £14.95, 199pp, ISBN 9781906069230

Considering the forests' worth of paper given over to the historic UFO incident in Suffolk's Rendlesham Forest in December 1980, this slender new account by George Wingfield (better known to this parish as one of the notable crop circle investigators) could be worth all of its forerunners. Where many other accounts endlessly retell the incident as a classic alien invasion or crashed saucer, here is a no-nonsense document in military history mode. Beginning with the late-night sightings of 'something' with flashing lights appearing in the forest so close to a USAF airbase, Wingfield builds up a forensic case for it being an experimental space capsule that dropped accidentally from the helicopter transporting it. Despite the eye-witness accounts which appeared in newspapers for months afterwards, and those obtained by enterprising ufologists, the inevitable top-level governmental denials (including assertions that some, including airmen from the base, were lying) the story turned into a conspiracy theorist's dream. Wingfield sets the account straight with this thorough and well-written history, adding more background to the people and places as well as revealing the mystery object and its purpose. Essential for any ufologist's (and school) library as an example of UFO investigation without the hysterics.

Shadow Animals

Dawn Baumann Brunke

Inner Traditions/Bear, 2022.

Pb, £19.99, 312pp, ISBN 9781591434573

Brunke – who runs workshops on dreams, communicating with animals, and something called 'shadow work' – believes we all have a 'Shadow' – "a hated, abandoned, judged and denied aspect of ourselves". She claims that we can communicate with and recruit this aspect of our spiritual life as an ally which will enhance our spiritual strength, purpose and will. Over 13 exercises, Brunke presents a selection of shadow animal types, explaining what they mean in terms of our fears, prejudices and repressions. It might be nonsense ... or it might not. You'd have to find out for yourself...

UFOs: The Real Story

Paul Ascough

Flying Disk Press 2023

Pb, £17.15, 213pp, ISBN 9798377040811

This revised edition (original, 2021) typifies a trend among modern ufology books (many of them from this publisher): a veteran ufologist feels compelled to tell his own version of the 'truths' of ufological history that he has discovered, inspired both by his own sightings and strange experiences, researching and listening to others who, apparently, have had similar experiences. Ascough's passion is firmly rooted in the images of the Adamski era; strangely animated by simplistic references to Spiritualism, occultism, Eastern religion, biblical fantasies, parapsychology, and New Age idealism. Believers will hail such testaments, told with obvious sincerity and passion; but nothing of what passes for detail herein would change the mind of a rationalist. Ascough's 'good news' message is diluted by curious slogans – such as "It's not a conspiracy if it's true." – positioned wherever there is any white space.

The Shape of Things to Come

Chris Evers

Flying Disk Press, 2023

Pb, £11.99, 215pp, ISBN 9798863580678

If there is one thing Flying Disk is accomplishing, it is in providing a publishing platform – outside the mainstream – for very personal approaches to ufology, especially from people who believe they have a story to tell or a theory to promote. Chris Evers grew up in Hull, in the heady 1970s, sharing with friends his experiences both of sightings and their many interpretations. More recently, he presented several network radio shows on paranormal and ufological topics. This one is Evers's personal thesis on the history of ufology and the puzzling variety of UFO shapes.

Sacred Geometry of the Starcut Diagram

Malcolm Stuart

Inner Traditions/Bear, 2022

Hb, £26, 320pp, ISBN 9781644114308

The simple shape of this eponymous geometric formation consists of eight intersecting triangles within a square and yet – explains Malcolm Stuart, a priest, musician, TV producer and designer of stained-glass windows – it can be found throughout history in art and architecture, but especially in sacred designs from occult and yantra diagrams, to the Pythagorean Golden Number, magic squares and as the basis for surveying methods. Stuart's history of the widespread cultural use of this geometry is accessible to anyone, informative without being boring or baffling, and beautifully illustrated throughout. It would make an inspiring present for a bright kid or to anyone interested in the magic and mystery of number and form in nature.

New Testament Apocrypha, Volume 3

Ed. Tony Burke.

Wm B Eerdmans Publishing, 2023

HB, £46.00, 683pp, ISBN 9780802877932

Following the pattern of the previous two volumes, this one focuses on the lesser-known and least-studied apocryphal acts and epistles, many of which are newly edited or Englished for the first time. We salute Prof. Burke and the 27 other stalwarts here who represent the almost-unsung branch of patiently dedicated and impossibly erudite scholarship of neglected manuscripts from the first two centuries. Each of the 29 titles is given a rich and thorough apparatus: including discussions of the available versions of the manuscripts and their translation, as well as their historical provenance and theological context. Beyond the immediate academic and teaching beneficiaries of these quiet heroics, a judicious fortean might find some fascination in these ancient accounts of early religious actors and their mystical phenomena. Titles include 'The Image of Edessa', 'The Dream of the Rood', 'The Dialogue between Jesus and the Devil', 'The Decapitation of John the Forerunner', and 'The Dialogue of Mary and Christ on the Departure of the Soul'. Lesser mortals will greatly mourn the omission of an index of subjects.

1973: A Time of UFO Sightings, Landings and Abductions

Kevin D. Randle

Flying Disk Press, 2023

Pb, £15.50, 236pp, ISBN 9798390487921

One of ufology's pre-eminent specialists in the notorious Roswell incident of 1947 rehashes very old case material. One has to wonder why ... or whether he can have anything new to add to his 80 previous books?

How to Become a Modern Magus

Don Webb

Destiny/Inner Traditions/Bear Books, 20

Pb, £25, 461pp, ISBN 9781644113424

Need a guide to the bewildering complexity that is the path to becoming a 21st century occult magician? Don Webb – a practitioner for 45 years and a teacher for 35 of them – provides a comprehensive course in the form of 12 monthly stages in a system of Chaos, Temple of Set and shamanic magic. It is complimented by sections on the elements, gods, rituals of all kinds, focused activities and exercises. How effective is it? This reviewer has no idea, but Webb does include advice on protections (just in case).

TO SEND REVIEW COPIES, CONTACT THE EDITOR AT DRSUTTON@FORTEANTIMES.COM

Fright Christmas

Art the Clown awakens just in time to unleash seasonal mayhem on victims of all ages

Terrifier 3

Dir Damien Leone, US 2024
On general release

From his humble beginnings in Damien Leone's 2008 horror short *The 9th Circle*, Art the Clown has become a slasher icon in his own right, the mainstream popularity of the killer clown having propelled him towards the cult status usually reserved for all-time slasher greats such as Freddy, Jason, and Michael.

This is thanks not only to Leone dreaming up the demonic clown in the first place, but also to the way David Howard Thornton has brought him to life with an exceptional combination of unwavering commitment and whimsical charisma since he took over the role with his feature film debut in 2017's *Terrifier*.

Not since Ghostface has a slasher villain made such an indelible impact on popular culture, but unlike the *Scream* franchise, the *Terrifier* movies are independent, low-budget endeavours, which not only makes their widespread success that much more impressive, but also attests to the passion and sincerity with which the filmmakers approach their work.

The franchise has evolved from the first film, which was largely composed of sadistic set piece vignettes without much narrative value. The second film introduced final girl Sienna Shaw and some supernatural lore, adding narrative interest to the fantastical gore, and in the third instalment, Leone proves that he does listen to criticism, as he has ensured a much tighter edit with a shorter runtime than its overly long predecessor.

A giddy mix of vaudeville antics and Grand Guignol gore

As for the story and setting of *Terrifier 3*, gorehounds get an early Christmas present, as Art the Clown awakens five years after the events of *Terrifier 2* to wreak sadistic mayhem once more, maiming his way through victims of all ages as he stalks siblings Sienna (Lauren LaVera) and Jonathan (Elliott Fullam) during the holiday season.

Thornton further expands on Art's character, remaining mute as he does so, imbuing him with more personality as well as an escalation of the character's delightfully grotesque sense of humour. Similarly, LaVera's performance as Sienna adds an interesting counterpart to Thornton's demonic presence. The lore is also further expanded upon, adding a sense of mystery while leaving enough questions open for further exploration in subsequent sequels.

A word of warning to casual viewers is warranted, as *Terrifier 3* seeks to outdo the previous films in terms of gory creativity, so if you are not familiar with the antics of Art the Clown and are not a fan of over-the-top, drawn-out brutality with enough blood and gore to make a young Sam Raimi blush, giving the franchise a wide berth is probably wise.

Gruesome as it may seem on the surface – and it most certainly is not for everyone – what makes *Terrifier 3* a worthwhile entry in the annals of horror in general and slashers in particular is its giddy mix of vaudeville antics and Grand Guignol gore; one can only imagine what horrors Leone could concoct with a bigger budget.

Leyla Mikkelsen

★★★★☆

Children of the Cult

Dir Maroesja Perizonius, UK 2024
On general release

Children of the Cult is a disturbing story of child sexual abuse within an international spiritual cult, told by the survivors. They recall how adult cult members were encouraged to explore sexual experiences of all kinds, not just with other consenting adults, but with children as well.

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was an Indian guru and teacher who built up a massive following of devotees, many of them Westerners drawn to his charismatic personality. He created one of the world's biggest and most successful cults, which at its height in the 1970s and 80s had communes in more than 30 countries.

Filmmaker Maroesja Perizonius's mother became a devotee and like many others, when she went to start a new life in the cult, she brought her daughter with her. Maroesja was only six years old at the time. Part retrospective, part unfolding investigation, her film looks back on events from 40 years ago, which still impact on the emotional lives of those who were abused. It's an astonishing story of being a child within a cult whose leader taught that children should be given complete freedom and could chose to become sexually active. Those that didn't choose were often pressured and cajoled into having sex unwillingly. Given their age, technically it was rape. They had no other experience of the outside world and believed their way of life to be normal. They were largely separated from their parents, and lived in an environment where sex was everywhere. The cult inevitably attracted pædophiles, who took full advantage. One former child of the cult said that between the ages of 12 to 16, she had slept with 150 different men.

In her investigation Maroesja unmasks perpetrators and demands answers from members of the cult's inner circle. The responses she gets are sometimes contrition, sometimes denial; one serious abuser, still teaching mediation, gets angry and calls the allegations "bullshit!" Surprisingly, the woman closest to the guru, and arguably the most powerful female in the movement, agreed to be interviewed. She appears on camera, a frail, grey-haired old lady, sitting across a table from Maroesja. At first, she answers the questions cautiously and evasively, before standing up, removing her microphone, and walking off camera.

It's a sad story, but the fortean interest lies in the way that people, within their own closed value systems, can normalise erroneous beliefs and behaviours. In the case of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, his teachings were not just erroneous, but morally corrupt and led to criminal behaviour. He died in 1990, but many of his meditation practices survive and the movement has evolved into Osho International.

Ted Harrison

★★★★☆

TELEVISION

FT's resident couch potatoes, STU NEVILLE & RUTH MORRIS cast an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings

Among pubs which proclaim their spectres, competition is rife to be crowned the most haunted. Such an appellation clearly demands the attention of expert adjudicators, to investigate and validate with a keen, impartial professionalism: however, this would make for a dry and clinical documentary. Happily, *Britain's Most Haunted Pubs* (Prime) dispenses with these qualifications and puts in a startlingly unprofessional team of the sort that mistakes matching polo shirts and natty matching hats with experience. They have name badges.

Led by Jacquie, who resembles an uncanny combination of Ann Hegerty from *The Chase* and Alan Ford, this dubious team kick off investigations at London's Viaduct Tavern, reputedly England's most haunted pub. The narrator, who if not an AI rendering should be doing announcements for London Transport or possibly Carpetright adverts, intones that the team, which consists largely of a small group of mediums, are there to investigate "mysterious enigmas that cloak the tavern in an eerie mystique" and unexplained happenings involving drinks disappearing. "When you actually walk in," Jacquie ejaculates, "You're fired, you're ready to go." There are a number of talking head shots, presumably to establish their authenticity, but instead it comes over rather like a paranormal *Creature Comforts*. The usual antics ensue, with low-light appeals to hidden spooks, crew members being caressed by hands unseen (it was dark, in fairness), after which we're assured they've found "enough evidence to come to a conclusion" – which is that it's a haunted pub. Still, no time to waste as we nip across the border to look at Wales's most haunted pub, the Skirrid Inn (which is in Wales; this will become important.) Before even starting, the intrepid team tells us that "it definitely gets some paranormal activity" – what, such as being haunted? Cue Jacquie, who assures us it takes a lot to convince her a place is haunted, despite evidence to the contrary 20 minutes earlier. Nonetheless, within seconds she has identified the ghost of room three as Fanny Price, which led to a lively debate between us as to whether the heroine of *Mansfeld Park* would actually have an afterlife. But Jacquie is already on to the next phantom, whom she admits can't conclusively be identified as Judge Jeffries, but she does so anyway. Time for more low-light shrieking, sensory-deprived Dan listening to what sounds like someone beat-boxing "Firestarter", Jacquie sticking her head in a noose, the sort of noises that old pubs make when cooling down in the early hours, and a truly horrific fæcal-brown bathroom suite – but evidence enough for them to proclaim it the "most haunted pub in England." Which is in Wales.

Time for a truly horrific fæcal brown bathroom suite

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

In horror films, not all shadows are cast by the monsters. Some scary movies are released in the shadow of a previous film and are held to a higher standard than most. This month, we have films that had to live up to a previous success.

First, the big one: *The Exorcist* was a phenomenon when it puked all over world culture in 1973. Yet its much-anticipated sequel span heads for all the wrong reasons. In *Exorcist II: The Heretic*, it's been four years since Regan MacNeil went 'full-demon'. She's now in therapy…and *you'll* need therapy too, after this. Director John Boorman skips the original film's raw simplicity and turns it into a baffling, sometimes hilarious, art project. Should Linda Blair tap dance for mentally ill kids? Sure! Should James Earl Jones wear a giant locust hat? Absolutely! I must be in league with Satan, because I have a soft spot for it. I even found some of the imagery (burning women and, yes, the locusts) scary, and the Morricone score is first-rate. But it's mostly just bonkers and objectively bad.

After this, the franchise needed a miracle… and lo, in the year 1990, the Lord delivered. *The Exorcist Part III* (Arrow) is a fascinating film that gets better with every watch. Lt Kinderman (the detective from the original) returns to investigate a, ritualistic serial killer stalking the eerie streets of Georgetown. George C Scott is perfect here; a lot is, actually.

It's mostly just bonkers and objectively bad

William Peter Blatty was previously known for comedy writing. His sharp and funny dialogue shines here, but so does his direction. He loads *Part III* with dread, theology, humanity and proper chills, whether it's the goosebumps you feel at a sheet of paper rattling on a desk, or one of the best jump scares in cinema. Perfection isn't sustained, yet it still casts a solid shadow of its own.

Read the synopsis for *Haunted Ulster: Live* (Prime) and you'll know what shadow it stands in. A fake TV Special is broadcast 'live' from a haunted suburban family home. Some will dismiss this as a lazy photocopy of the BBC's infamous *Ghostwatch* (like when Aldi brought out their blatant copy of Dr Pepper called Professor Peppy). Yet, just as *The Blair Witch Project* didn't 'own' the found footage genre, I hardly think the world is allowed but one *Ghostwatch*. For sure, *Ulster* is on the Dr Peppy end of things, but I enjoyed the spirited cast, comedy focus and home-brewed nostalgic energy.

With the then-fashionable name of Edgar Allen Poe splashed on the posters, *The Oblong Box* (BFI) stood in the shadow of a horror OG. But it's just Poe-etic licence as all he wrote was the title. Vincent 'impossible-to-dislike' Price broods with his twentysomething wife and 'hideously deformed' brother (who turns out not to look that bad). The final shot gives a teeny-tiny jolt, but after the garish palette of Corman and Hammer, the colour scheme and visuals are weary, drab and two-dimensional – much like the film as a whole.

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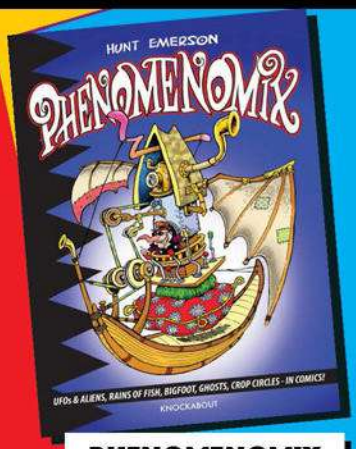

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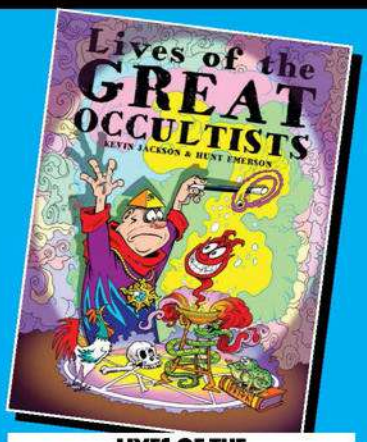

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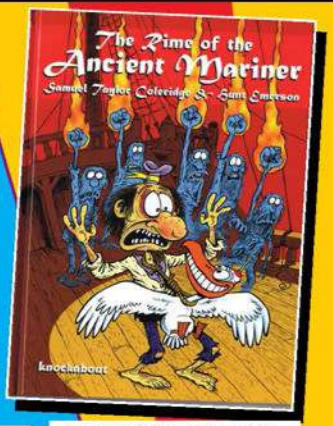

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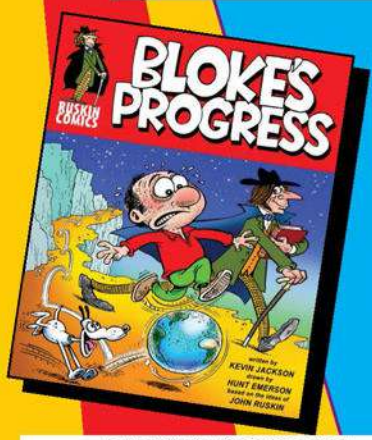

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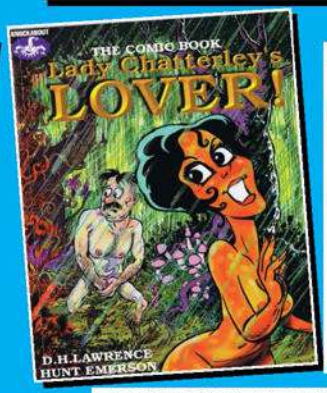

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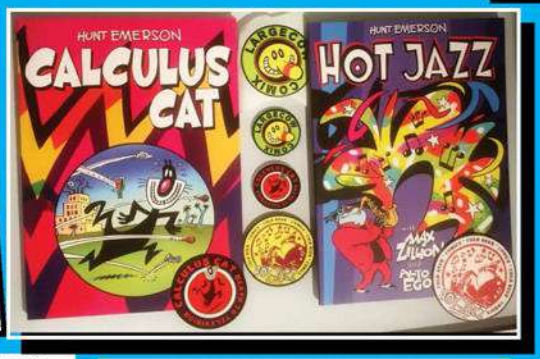

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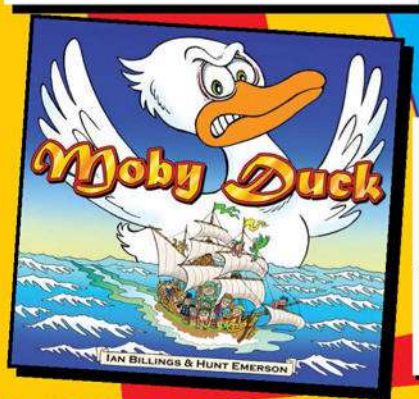

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Pyramid power

Mark Spurlock ('Pyramid Power', **FT448: 63**) asked whether anyone succeeded in sharpening razor blades under a mail order mini-pyramid. I learned of this apparent phenomenon as a child in the early 1990s from Terry Deary's *Horrible Histories: The Awesome Egyptians*, wherein it was suggested that it might also keep food items fresh. I duly sacrificed some cereal boxes and Sellotape in the construction of my own miniature wonder of the world. Sadly, I have to report that the scrap of bread I tested it with succumbed to staleness and mould at the expected rate, although for all I know it may have been supernaturally healthy and robust mould!

Fraser Dallachy
Glasgow

Ancient Engineering

With all due respect to Dave Miles, [**FT449:65**], who I believe was commenting on my letter [**FT447:63**], I didn't say that the ancient Egyptians couldn't have built the Great Pyramid. Clearly, given "a large labour force", it would have been possible; but it is the time factor that is the issue. The Great Pyramid is a tomb, according to mainstream Egyptology, and so needed to be completed in time for its occupant's (King Khufu) death. Egypt did not have unlimited numbers of labourers – and other tasks necessary to the survival of the country (e.g. agriculture) also needed to be completed. And some aspects of building the edifice (e.g. the narrower part of the pyramid, near its top, and its complex internal system of chambers, which incorporate some heavy granite blocks), involved working in restricted spaces and therefore the number of workers that could be deployed would have been very limited.

So, either it was a tomb and some highly unusual and potentially advanced building methods were used or it wasn't and therefore took considerably more than a third millennium BC human lifetime to complete. Either way, mainstream Egyptology's views on the Great Pyramid are wrong.

Geoff Clifton
Solihull, West Midlands

Sherwood figure

A couple of years ago my partner, her daughter and I were walking through Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire. I took this photograph with a digital camera on one of the many trails you can take through the forest. At the time, there was nobody in the pathway.

I only noticed the 'wizard' figure (complete with skull cap and cape) when I reviewed the images at home. I'm quite certain there was no one, or thing, there at the time. If you zoom in on it, it looks even more freaky.

Jason Lunnon, *By email*

Geoff Clinton (Letters **FT447:63**) asks why my piece on the construction of the Great Pyramid did not include discussion of Davidovits geopolymer theory – essentially suggesting that the blocks used to make it are concrete rather than natural stone. I did cover this theory in some detail in a Science column in **FT220:22-23** and I agree I might have referred back to this, as the theory, though unproven, is an interesting one and far from dead.

• The suggestion that the Calvine UFO picture shows an F-117 Nighthawk 'stealth fighter' [**FT449:68**] can be easily dispelled by looking at end-on views of the actual aircraft (e.g. 85-0818 | Lockheed F-117A Nighthawk | United States - US Air Force (USAF) | Gregg Stansbery | JetPhotos)

Ironically enough, seen end-on, the F-117 looks more like a flying saucer rather than being diamond-shaped like the UFO in the image. Seen from other angles, the F-117 looks like an aircraft, with obvious wings and tail.

While it is possible the photograph does depict some still-classified 'black aircraft,' it does not appear to correspond to anything known to the large number of enthusiasts who study this field.

David Hambling
London

Jacobus van Dyn

In reply to Tamsin Rosewell's letter [**FT449:68**], whether Jacobus van Dyn actually sold his head after his death, I think the answer is: he didn't. I have been told that he died in a hospital in or near the Mile End area of east London, probably in the early 1980s. It has been stated elsewhere that he was going to write a book about his life's colourful adventures, of mixing with 1930s American mobsters, and working as a stevedore.

The initial jottings of this idea were in an exercise book that was with him in hospital. I was once acquainted with a chap who was employed by the funeral firm who removed van Dyn's body from the hospital. He knew about this book, but it didn't accompany the deceased as property; it may have been retained by the hospital authority. I believe that van Dyn was buried in Manor Park cemetery, east London.

Ronnie Knight
By email

Enfield poltergeist

Further to Alan Murdie's Enfield poltergeist overview [**FT440:14-17**], he appears to have selected a somewhat noncommittal quotation by the (oft-quoted) photographer Graham Morris. More solidly, *The Times* (23 Oct 2023), for whom Mr Morris worked as a sports photographer, has the headline, 'Poltergeist Girl Just Jumped', as he unequivocally replies to the question, "Did she levitate?" with, "No. But then I'm in a house with members of the Society for Psychical Research. They went: 'Oh, she's levitating'. I just stared back. I wasn't there to make any claims... The SPR guys were fanatical. And they were amateurs. They were there to prove a point. The family were having a hard time... They wanted people to come and explain what was going on."

Confusingly, Morris is also quoted as saying, "It certainly wasn't fake", so maybe pinning him down is not so easy!

Michael Slatter
Crawley, West Sussex

LETTERS

Leaning plants

The report on Cook's pine (*Araucaria columnaris*) [**FT445:6**] says: "Cook's pines are the only plants so far discovered that consistently lean in a geographical direction."

Sorry, not so! Here in Tucson, Arizona, we have a cactus species that does it: the fishhook barrel cactus (*Ferocactus wislizwni*) which always leans southwest. It's a pillar-shaped cactus that begins to lean as it matures. The 'lean' is nowhere near as spectacular as Cook's pine – the cactus rarely reaches more than 5ft (1.5m) – but it's consistent. *The Encyclopedia of Cacti* tells us: "Older barrels can lean so far they uproot themselves and fall over, especially after heavy rains when the soil is loose."

Leslie Vinson
Tucson, Arizona

Fast and blue

I recently came across Jeanette Winterson's account of her ghostly encounter in the article *Let's Get Physical* [**FT443:16**]. In it she describes her mind's eye image of the visitant as "*a small and swift doctor in a dark blue coat*". This immediately reminded me of the description that Whitley Strieber gave of some of the visitors that he encountered during the period he covers in his book *Communion*. He describes one which "*wore dark-blue coveralls and was extremely fast*". A co-incidence perhaps, but an intriguing one I thought.

Ann Finnemore
Leicestershire

Synchronicity and grief

My mum died in April 2024. I have heard that people often experience meaningful coincidences when grieving, and my family has been no exception. Almost at the very moment my mum died, my brother sent my dad a video he had taken moments before of a Dixieland jazz band playing at Edinburgh Waverley station. Mum always said she wanted trad jazz played at her funeral. Of course, my brother knew mum was in palliative care, but he sent that video before he knew of her death, and the band isn't there every day.

At the wake, a family friend was playing the guitar. He started playing one of mum's favourite songs, a not altogether famous Scottish folk song called "Willie o' Winsbury". He knew mum, but he didn't know it was her favourite. It was just a part of his repertoire.

When I went back to work, one of my first customers was from Singapore. Mum lived there in the 1960s. Not wholly unusual in a large bookshop in central London, but striking on my first day back after compassionate leave.

The final incident is not a synchronicity. I put the order of service for mum's funeral on a cabinet in the hallway. One night, as I walked past, it moved, almost as if it were turning towards me. I assumed this was caused by a draught, but have been unable to recreate the movement by walking by at any speed.

Mum used to laugh and tease me whenever I repeated any story from *Fortean Times*. I hope she's still laughing.

Bird falls

I saw this photo on Facebook and it said that waxwing birds often eat fermenting fruit and get drunk and lie on the pavement… this seemed very odd and I'd never heard of that behaviour before. I wonder what Fort would've made of it? I don't think it explains all bird falls but it's certainly a new one on me.

Darren Grant, *By email*

• I was surprised that Ryan Shirlow didn't mention that the excellent theme tune for *Fortean TV* is "Danny's Inferno" by The Three Suns. I have happy memories of watching the show with my parents back in the 1990s. I was probably too young for it but was allowed to stay up. It probably gave me my penchant for the weird. It certainly introduced me to the word "fortean", and in 2002 I bought my first copy of *Fortean Times* because, with no more series of *Fortean TV* and the Internet still a novelty, it seemed the easiest way to get a regular fix of the bizarre. When I hear that theme, I get a Proustian rush of eerie trepidation and delight.

Lewis Hurst
London

Aphantasia

Last year I celebrated my 50th birthday and for the first time in 50 years realised I was different from the majority of my friends. I have no mind's eye. When people spoke about a mind's eye, I thought it was a metaphorical construct, not an actual thing. If I ask you to think about a blue tiger, can you close your eyes and 'see' a blue tiger? I see nothing, I experience only darkness. This neurological condition is called 'Aphantasia' and means I have a 'blind' mind's eye.

I do not feel that I have missed out on anything – for me it is congenital, it is something that I have always had, or not had depending on your point of view. I also have no mind's ear and do not have an internal narrator commenting on my every action. Again, I have never had it so do not miss it, and when people ask do I feel lonely, I don't know what it would be like to share my head with anyone's voice.

I could go into some depth about this and how I rarely dream in visuals but more in feelings, ideas and knowledge and how I can't picture the faces or voices of my loved ones, but that feels like an article by someone more eloquent than me.

I wonder whether any surveys and any investigations into witnesses of fortean phenomena have ever asked the question about the 'power' of the witness's mind's eye; and it *is* a power. As I speak to people about this and read the research on line, the level of visualisation seems to be a spectrum with less than four per cent having no mind's eye to 10 per cent being hyper-visualisers who can augment reality with their mind's eye and the majority of others falling somewhere between these two groups.

So can UFOs, bigfoot, ghosts, fairies etc be partly explained by a combination of heightened expectation, misidentification of the mundane and the ability to hyper-visualise? Does this destroy the 'magic' of the unknown?

Am I bringing this to the attention of the readers because I somewhat feel bereft that my aphantasia has prevented me from experiencing a fortean world? On the contrary, I have had out-of-body experiences

(twice), seen a ghost (witnessed along with my dog), heard a 'voice of authority', had many prophetic dreams and thoughts and have interacted with the house pixies (asking them to return items) on many occasions; indeed, it is now accepted as natural by both my wife and I when we can't find something.

Does this make my experience more real, or more intriguing – probably not – and does it make the witnesses that have a mind's eye less reliable? I am being facetious, but it would be interesting to see people like Simon Young add this question to the next Fairy Census and any budding Jenny Randles ask this when taking UFO witness statements and note any correlation.

Secondly, I am also intrigued if anyone knows whether this is a 'cultural' thing. Do different cultures have the concept and are the percentages of hyper-visualisers to those with aphantasia consistent across populations? Surely a Phd subject for some buddying psychologist and/or anthropologist.

Are those with aphantasia aphantastics? If no one has used that word before, I'd like to take the credit.

Richard Bagnall
Staines upon Thames, Surrey

Armada Ghost Books

I don't see mentioned in *FT* what I believe is that stalwart of the Haunted Generation, namely the Armada Ghost Books. Google tells me there were 15 in total, published between 1967 and 1983. They were aimed at older children and included stories by MR James and Conan Doyle. The books had fantastic covers and sketches inside to illustrate some of the tales. Out of print, they fetch a good price on online auction sites.

As an adolescent I found that they were a great introduction to paranormal fiction, and as an adult I went on to read probably 99% of all the Victorian and Edwardian ghost stories ever published.

I'm not sure how popular the books would be with children today. I tried introducing my daughter to these stories about 10 years ago, but their style lacks the instant attention-grabbing razzmatazz of current children's literature aimed at a generation easily distracted and reluctant to read. How many 14-year-olds would read MR James now?

Anyway, these stories are one of my best memories from the 1970s (arguably the best decade ever to be a child in). Back then, what child interested in ghostly tales could possibly resist reading stories called 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid' and 'The Boy Who Walked Widdershins Round the Kirk'?

Russ Townsend
Stratford St Mary, Suffolk

Monkey puzzle trees

Regarding Ted Harrison's Forum piece on monkey puzzle trees [**FT446:47**]: when I was a boy in the late 1950s, I lived at the very top end of the Rhondda Valley in Wales. There was still a large number of coal mines. Each mine had its manager, and each manager was provided with a house. Every manager's house had a monkey puzzle tree in the front garden. This was so prevalent a feature that one could assume that any monkey puzzle tree had a manager's house behind it, for they were seen nowhere else.

Whether the garden was extensive or tiny made no difference; there was always the monkey puzzle tree. I say 'the' tree because there was only one in each garden. No one ever knew, or dared ask, just why they were there, or how and when they were planted. They were accepted as just one of those things.

Nowadays the houses have become divided into tinier and tinier "DSS flats" (as they are called locally) and the trees have gone. I have been told recently that some tenants considered them "poisonous to children". Both myself and the other boys considered them unclimbable, partly because of the difficult branches, but mostly because we believed there was a malevolent monkey hidden there. In mitigation, we were all less than 10 years old.

In addition, we were all convinced that if we saw a dead sheep, we would die of lockjaw unless we walked around the corpse three times then spat hard. I think someone could compile a long list of lockjaw (tetanus)-related superstitions.

Viv Hobbs
Caerphilly, Wales

Dancing Points

Like Lise Cribbin, I also used to "see air" [**FT432:66**]. This happened at night when I was about seven or eight years old. Sometimes the patterns used to frighten me and I remember lying awake rigid with fear. But unlike with Lise, it has never come back. As an adult, I always assumed it was caused by immature rod cells in my eye as it only happened to me in the dark.

Dr Peter WH Smith
Watton At Stone, Hertfordshire

Idealism versus Multiverse

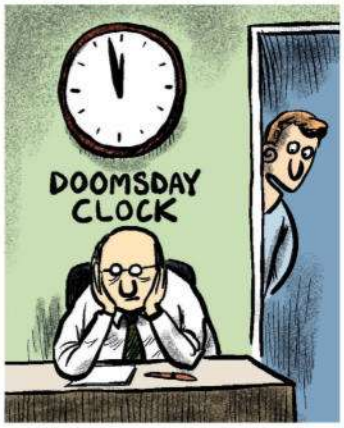
I enjoyed David Hambling's article about the multiverse [**FT446:11**], and feel inspired to chip in with an alternative way of looking at things. The rather confusingly named idealism proposes that matter arises from mind, rather than vice versa.

If you take an object in your hand right now, it's uncontroversial for me to say that the experiences you have of seeing it and feeling it arise in your mind. They are in their very essence experiential. We tend to infer from these experiences a physical reality "out there". However, taking a computer operating system as an analogy, we can see that it isn't so improbable that there is no physical substance giving rise to the experiences. Your computer operating system presents your files to you as a kind of object. It's like a very simple physics engine, in which you can move these objects around, create and destroy. But it's actually just an interface designed to facilitate your manipulation of pure information. This way of looking at things solves the "hard problem of consciousness", namely, that if matter is an entirely different substance to mind, and matter came first, then how on earth did matter produce mind? The idea that there is no matter has a long history, from the Buddhist "mind only" school, through to George Berkeley in the 18th century and beyond. Bernardo Kastrup has produced recent peer-reviewed work on the subject.

My suggestion is that the physical world exists to serve your thinking, albeit it's a committee effort that you won't always like or understand. You're just a tiny fraction of the distributed agency pervading the whole thing. The apparent physical world is more like a long argument.

David Hambling gives the example of Schrodinger's Cat, and contrasts the Copenhagen interpretation, in which the probability space collapses on observation to just a single cat, either dead or alive, with the multiverse interpretation in which the cat is both dead and alive in different universes. What I am suggesting leans more to the Copenhagen but with the flavour that the cat lives or dies *to serve observation*. Idealism centres psychology. It changes our expectations of the world. The laws of physics become more like the habits of physics, or the suggestions of physics. Certainly a great many paranormal phenomena are explained by the idea that our world is a vast group work in progress, like an open-source software project, with competing ideas and imperfect consensus, and maybe some relic code hanging around. Allowing agency to be central to its development makes for much greater economy. Did our Universe fluke the conditions we need to exist? Or did it work on this solution?

Genevieve Gorrell
Preston, Lancashire



"Are you coming to the pub, Bob? It's Happy Hour"

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Readers write in with their own accounts of strange phenomena

Spooky episodes

• I was 13 – this would be about 1975. West end of Newcastle, housing estate, lovely summer evening – around 10 of us kids swapping Soccer Stars and just hanging about. The sun was well down, casting long shadows. Someone spotted a UFO low in the west, a classic cigar shape. The setting sun appeared to make it shine bright silver, though that seems odd because the very low sun was 'behind' the UFO.

It appeared to be stationary, at some distance (determined later by passing jets) to be perhaps a mile or two away from us. There was no sound audible. As we watched, what appeared to be an army jet came up from bottom left, flying in a direct diagonal up (behind?) the UFO, followed immediately by a second jet from bottom right, flying diagonally until both jets disappeared, leaving a wonderful contrail smack in the middle of the UFO. I cannot recall how the UFO vanished. But it was reported on in the next day's *Evening Chronicle*. At that age, I had no real interest (or even perception) of the UFO phenomenon or the paranormal, so this incident did not excite or entice me at the time.

• My mother was not religious in any way, though she did believe in the spiritual world. When I was 16 she told me of the time she "saw a ghost". She was 15, standing at the backyard gate, looking across the narrow, cobbled lane at the opposite gate where old Mrs somebody lived, when her skin prickled and she had the immediate knowledge that the old lady had died. Moments later, a bright white 'form' came floating from said neighbour's gate, dissipating upwards. It was like seeing an angel, she said. And yes, the old lady had died in her armchair just minutes earlier.

• In 1979, at the age of 17, I was babysitting with my girlfriend. We were watching TV, her lying on the couch, me lying on the floor, propped on an elbow. Something caught my eye to my left. There, on the carpet under the coffee table, was a head. One dimensional, flat to the carpet, its features seemed to be made up of white chalk lines – like when forensics mark the position of a body with a white outline. Only this wasn't just the outline. This image was clearly male, with a strong brow and prominent nose and jaw. It also had a lot of hair, curling down past its chin.

My first thought was 'burglar' and then he spoke: "I'm the Devil and I've come to get you."

I said something like "What the hell?" just as the image faded away. Some four or five seconds had passed. My girlfriend didn't see a thing. When I told my mother, she said the housing estate where we'd babysat was built on a battlefield – Roundheads and Cavaliers. 'You're having a laugh', I wish my younger self had said.

• My mother went to Spiritualist meetings, those that would be held in old halls and scout huts etc all over the north-east on a Sunday evening. Interested in trying to 'catch out' these obvious charlatans, I tagged along.

We went to many meetings over the years and I witnessed a lot that it seemed to me could only be possible if the receiver in the crowd was a stooge. Until – it happened to me when I was around 22. This fierce, bearded guy picked me out by pointing at me. I can't go into detail, but he described something I'd inherited and also told me of a dead relative that was "by my side". I was floored and flabbergasted. My rational brain told me that he could 'simply' read minds.

• My formative years involved a growing interest in the unexplained and the paranormal. I read both *Fortean Times* and *The Unexplained* magazines, and when, in 1978 the *Close Encounters* film came out, I spent what little money I had going to see it every night for six nights in a row. I was hooked.

• In 1983, aged 21, I became father to twin girls (not identical). We lived in a relatively new three-bed terrace house. When the twins were two-and-a-half years old, I found them standing together at the bottom of the stairs, looking up the stairs and waving and saying 'Hello'. When asked who they were talking to, both said "The old man". (This became a common, perhaps weekly, occurrence.)

• There was a constant bad smell halfway up the stairs – a pocket of stink you could poke your nose into. It smelt like rotten vegetables. One day, a glass of orange juice exploded over the cream carpet. On another day, a glass ashtray – never used, a gift from my family – split clean in two. On it was printed "Madness is hereditary, you get it from your kids". It sat where it always had, a decoration on the coffee table. No one had touched it.

• One night, I woke from my slumber to see the black silhouette of a man, leaning back causally against my bedroom doorjamb. He was around five feet [1.5m] tall, skinny, and wearing a fedora. My first thought was 'burglar' and then he spoke: "I'm the Devil and I've come to get you." At that, he slinked away around the doorway in the direction of the twins' bedroom. I flew out of bed, slammed on the light, charged down the landing, slammed on the twins' bedroom light, to find no "man in black", just my sleeping kids. My wife said I had a nightmare. I probably did. But my next 'encounter' had me running from the house.

• My wife was out, the twins upstairs asleep, and I was in the living room, trying to write a program on my ZX Spectrum. Behind me, through an archway in the wall, was our kitchen, where, an hour earlier, I'd made a cup of coffee. I was just thinking of stretching my legs and making

another cuppa when a terrible clattering in the kitchen had me jumping to my feet, heart pounding. There, in the middle of the kitchen floor, was the teaspoon I'd used and left on the countertop earlier. My skin froze. It felt like something was there – a presence, and something else was going to happen. I ran from the house to my cousin's house across the street and dragged him back with me, showed him the spoon on the floor. Nothing else strange happened that night.

These events happened over about three months and stopped as suddenly as they started. When I asked my toddlers why they didn't wave at the old man upstairs anymore, they said, "He's gone".

• Writing this reminded me of another weird poltergeist-y occurrence – the floating ketchup bottle. I was in the kitchen, aged around 12 and with my brother, aged 16. My mother asked someone to get the ketchup. Dad had built the cupboard where such foodstuffs were kept on top of a built-in cupboard and benchtop. My brother opened the cupboard door and we both witnessed the ketchup (glass) bottle 'float' from the shelf and land upright with a soft thud on the benchtop some two feet below. We were freaked out. Mam said it was "just a ghost having fun".

John Hudspith
South Yorkshire

Ghosts at Work

One of my previous jobs was working as a cleaner on the night-shift in a supermarket, between 2008 and 2010. My colleagues and I would have lunch in the staff canteen. There was a corridor that ran round the back of the canteen, and from where we sat, we couldn't see the whole of the corridor itself, but we *could* see both ends of it, so we knew if someone had entered or left it.

On three occasions, we heard strange, unexplained sounds. One was the sound of the manager's office door slamming shut; one was of the double swing-doors in the middle of the corridor opening and closing; the third was what sounded like someone sprinting – just four or five footsteps – down the corridor.

Despite my interest in the paranormal, I did not immediately think 'That's a ghost', but it was

She had once seen the image of a little girl standing in the doorway of the mortuary.

enough for my colleague Lisa and I to exchange confused glances and then for me to go and check there was no one there – which there wasn't. I didn't ask anyone if the place was meant to be haunted, or if anyone else had experienced anything strange there.

• In July 2022, I started work as a hospital porter, and being a fortean researcher, I asked the other staff whether they had experienced anything weird.

I heard both first-hand and third-hand tales of chilly feelings, unexplained footsteps, and an image of a woman standing in one department, with her feet unseen, as they appeared to be on a lower level of the current floor (which reminded me of Harry Martindale's phantom Romans in the cellars at York's Treasurer's House.)

One of the cleaners recounted how objects on shelves were moving around whilst she was trying to clean them, and I once saw a group of cleaners standing outside, saying they had to take a break because curtains and other objects were moving in a side room where a deceased patient was laid out on the bed. It was my job to go and take the patient to the mortuary with a colleague, so I went into the room, but I didn't witness anything odd.

However, there were two strange things which happened to me at the hospital, which I still can't explain.

A colleague and I took a deceased patient to the mortuary, and as we completed the paperwork, we both heard what sounded like a female voice making the sound 'eeeeeeeee!' It definitely sounded like a voice rather than something technical like air-conditioning. I checked the two adjoining rooms and there was no one else there and nothing to account for it. It didn't sound like an echo from another part of the building, or from outside, and it was a night-shift anyway with few people around at that time, so that also remains unexplained. One of the mortuary attendants later said that she had once seen the image of a little girl standing in the doorway of the mortuary.

I noted the second experience in my diary. It happened at 3.30pm on Sunday 3 December 2023 in the cubicle section of the Accident & Emergency department. There was an elderly lady on a trolley and I was going to take her to the X-ray department. There were also two relatives there, a man and a woman. Most of the cubicle doors stay open, but some don't, and when you try to keep them open, they bounce back off the wall (designers of A&E hospital doors please take note), and this door just wouldn't stay open, so I couldn't manoeuvre the trolley around it.

Suddenly, the door slowly moved back against the wall on its own! There was no breeze; it's a hygienic area with no windows. It was so amazing, that I said out loud: "That door just opened on its own,"' and the male relative of the patient replied: "I know. I saw it. It's a phantom. Spooky, isn't it?"

If it *was* a ghost, then it was a very helpful ghost, and since most of the doors in the hospital are not automatic, thus leaving porters to struggle getting patients on wheelchairs, trolleys and beds through the heavy wooden doors, then we could certainly do with some more helpful, door-opening ghosts!

Andy Owens
Halifax, West Yorkshire

Vortex of plastic

On a hot cloudless summer day in about 1975, I had been left with my grandmother, who had taken me shopping. On our return to her farm on the outskirts of Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, we discovered that we had been locked out. The keys were with her husband, who was out cutting hedges on the farm. We stood outside for several minutes, before realising there was something above us.

Hovering at about twice the height of the house was what appeared to be a whirlwind of something like shredded scraps of black bin liner, or polythene, (at a time before we used bin liners, and the rubbish was placed directly into the bin). The 'vortex' was about 30ft (9m) in diameter, and appeared to be flat, without any significant depth. There was no noticeable wind, and we watched this phenomenon for about 15 minutes before it slowly moved off across the fields. I then managed to climb through an open upstairs window with the aid of a ladder, and let my grandmother in, who then set about the business of preparing lunch.

When her husband arrived back shortly, he reported that while he had been working, he had felt as though he were being watched. Looking up he had noticed a strange 'whirlwind' that remained for some 15 minutes before moving off across the fields.

In all the years since, I have often looked for something similar, but have never encountered anything like it.

As a footnote, this happened close by to a hay meadow, where in the long grass, there were always small circular 'swirly' depressions, about six feet (1.8m) in diameter, which as children we all called 'cow nests'. Though these were almost certainly due to eddies caused by an overhanging hedge and clump of trees in one corner of the field.

Neil Deaville
Uttoxeter, Staffordshire

LETTERS

SIMULACRA CORNER

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to **Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH** or to **sieveking@forteantimes.com**

ABOVE: Emma Oxley saw this shocked tree in Sudbury, Derbyshire.

ABOVE: Nathan Bayer spotted this howling tree in Borrowdale valley, Cumbria.

LEFT: This photo was submitted by Kevin Williamson, who writes: "I have lived in a small village in Bulgaria for over 13 years and have passed this tree a lot of times but only just noticed the face. Perhaps it has not needed to yawn before."

RIGHT: Steve and Frieda Hughes of North Wales noticed this surprised tree in Nant y Coed woods, Llanfairfechan, in 2017.

PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past recalls the headlong descent of a Jersey carthorse that caused a local sensation in 1905

48. A HORSE'S SENSATIONAL FEAT

At shortly before six in the afternoon on Monday, 6 February 1905, the farmer M Le Brun, of Clubley Farm, Jersey, was leading a horse pulling a cart full of empty potato boxes. When they were almost at the gates of the old Mont à l'Abbé cemetery, one of the boxes fell onto the horse and caused it to bolt. Unable to turn the corner near Trafalgar Terrace, the horse instead went through a gap in the wall down the St John's Road Steps, leading to Queen's Road far below.

The road inspector Mr Manning was descending these 66 steps when he suddenly heard the horse coming running downstairs with the heavy cart. The moment he "saw the unusual spectacle of a horse and cart descending the steps", as the *Jersey Weekly Press* expressed it, he leapt over a low wall, landing in some bushes and saving himself from certain death. The horse clattered past him at speed, with its cart still attached.

Amazingly, the horse made it all the way down the 66 steps, but it collapsed and fell once it had reached level ground. A number of onlookers had heard the noise of its descent, but when one of them tried to raise the horse, the animal leapt up on its own accord, bolting off towards Rouge Bouillon. The horse continued through the Parade, Charing Cross and King Street, scattering pedestrians as it galloped through the busy streets, until the exhausted animal was finally brought to a standstill at the lower end of Queen Street by a man named Perree.

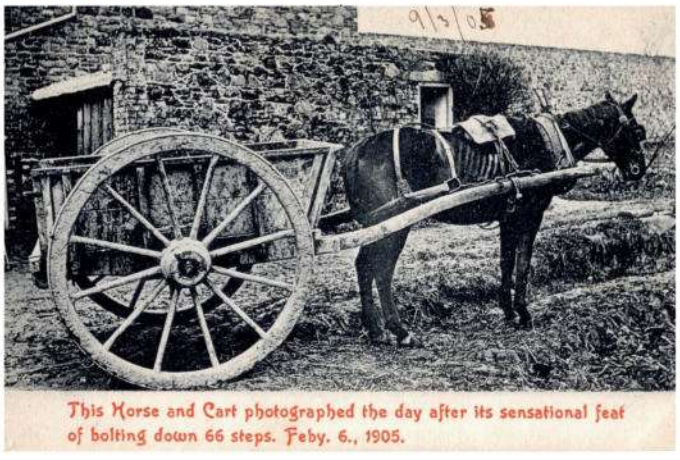
The steps bore plentiful marks of the horseshoes and the wheels of the heavy cart, but both horse and cart were entirely unharmed when examined and photographed the day after the escapade.

ABOVE: The St John's Road steps in Jersey shown on a postcard stamped and posted in 1905.
RIGHT: The horse shown bolting down the steps on a postcard stamped and posted to France in November 1905.
BELOW RIGHT: An unposted card showing the horse and carriage the day after the incident.

When the *Evening News* came to interview the main players in the drama, Mr Manning declared that his own escape from being run down by the horse had been truly marvellous. It was fortunate, he declared, that none of the inmates of the Little Sisters of the Poor Home had been returning home via the St John's Road Steps that afternoon, as they were normally in the habit of doing, since the horse and cart would have knocked them down like ninepins.

At least four picture postcards were inspired by the sensational feat of the Jersey horse: two of them merely show the steps, another a drawing of the horse descending them, and the fourth has a photograph of the stolid-looking horse the day after it had bolted.

Published by
Horace J Hamon
Jersey
"A HORSE'S SENSATIONAL FEAT."
Horse's Sensational feat of bolting down these 66 steps and running a considerable distance before being stopped.
Queen's Road, Jersey.



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WHY *FORTEAN*?

FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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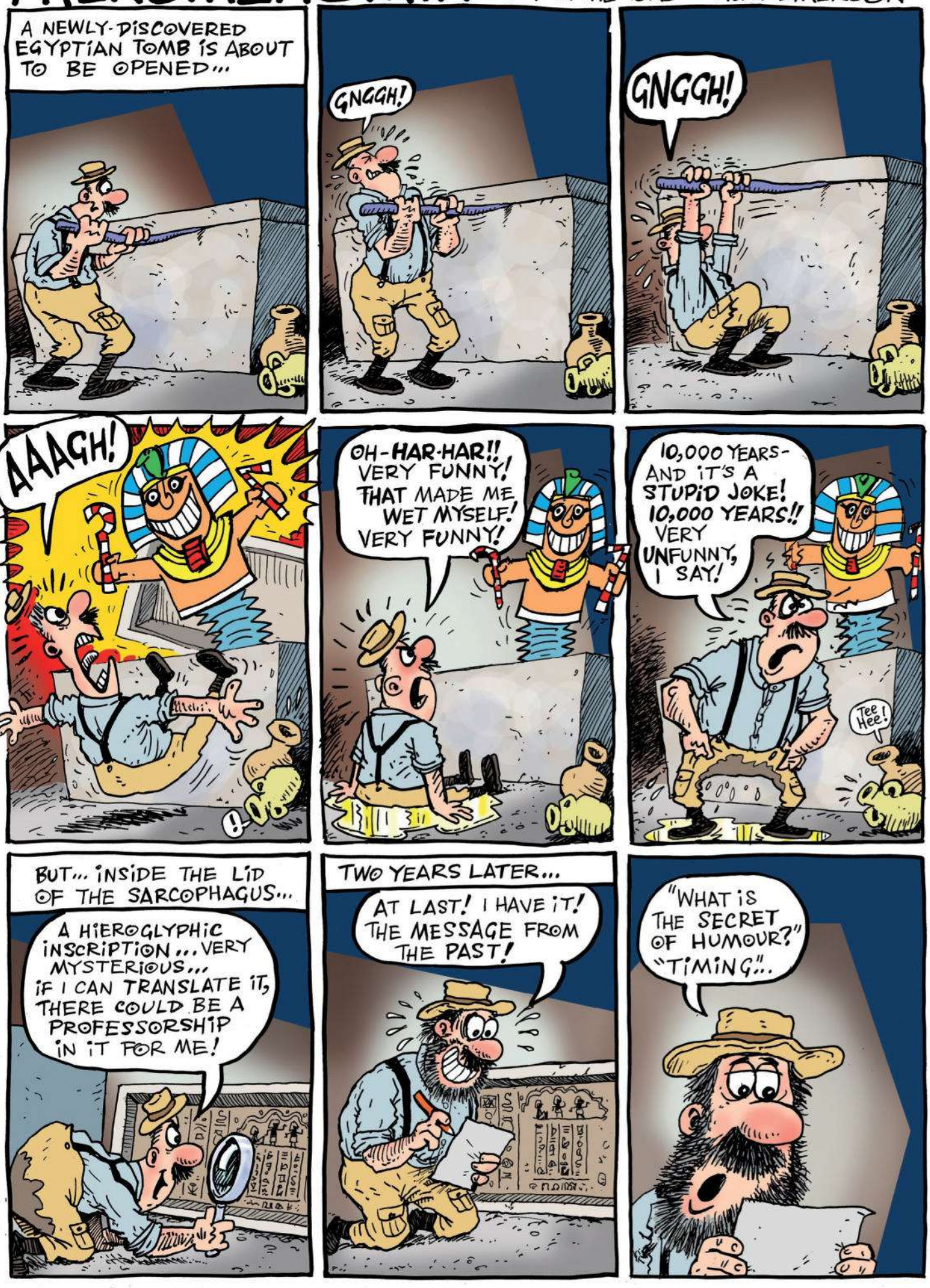
PHENOMENOMIX

JACK-IN-THE-TOMB

HUNT EMERSON


A NEWLY-DISCOVERED EGYPTIAN TOMB IS ABOUT TO BE OPENED...
GNGGH!
GNGGH!
AAAGH!
OH-HAR-HAR!! VERY FUNNY! THAT MADE ME WET MYSELF! VERY FUNNY!
10,000 YEARS- AND IT'S A STUPID JOKE! 10,000 YEARS!! VERY UNFUNNY, I SAY!
Tee Hee!
BUT... INSIDE THE LID OF THE SARCOPHAGUS...
A HIEROGLYPHIC INSCRIPTION... VERY MYSTERIOUS... IF I CAN TRANSLATE IT, THERE COULD BE A PROFESSORSHIP IN IT FOR ME!
TWO YEARS LATER...
AT LAST! I HAVE IT! THE MESSAGE FROM THE PAST!
"WHAT IS THE SECRET OF HUMOUR?" "TIMING"..

COMING NEXT MONTH

THE BOLD STREET TIME SLIPS

CHRISTMAS CRACKER

THE BOX OF DELIGHTS 40 YEARS ON

+

CHRISTMAS GHOSTS, HAUNTED BEDSTEAD, CRINOLINE INFERNO, AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 452

ON SALE 28 NOV 2024

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Staff searching for two pest control workers who had gone missing in a chicken processing plant in Attleborough, Norfolk, found Jonathan Collins, 34, and Neil Moon, 49, dead in a narrow space between the exterior wall of the factory and the wall of the neighbouring railway station. Both men had frozen hands and faces and there were traces of frost on the ground, despite the area not being refrigerated. It is suspected that their deaths were the result of a refrigeration gas leak, but no obvious source for the leakage has been found. *dailymail.co.uk, 8 July 2024*.

Despite a government crackdown in 2020, Mukbang, or extreme eating, livestreams remain popular in China. In these videos, the streamers attempt to eat grotesquely huge quantities of food while being egged on by an appreciative and paying online audience. One of the most prominent Mukbangers was Pan Xiaoting, who had given up her job as a waitress to Mukbang full time, performing feats such as eating non-stop for 10 hours a day or consuming over 10kg of food in a streaming session. Although her weight ballooned to 300kg (47 stone) and her parents feared for her health, Xiaoting continued her eating performances despite being hospitalised with gastric bleeding caused by overeating. She was so popular that her income allowed her to rent a house specifically for filming Mukbang content. However, on 14 July, aged 24, Xiaoting died live on camera in the midst of one of her Mukbangs. Although the cause of death has not been officially revealed, Chinese news website Sohu claimed she had died from the strain of overeating and that Xiaoting's autopsy revealed that her abdomen was severely deformed and her stomach full of undigested food. ***odditycentral.com, 19 Jul 2024.***

On the morning of 8 August, baggage handlers at Chicago's O'Hare airport discovered the corpse of a woman entangled in the conveyor belt system in a secure baggage handling area. The woman was later identified as Virginia Vinton, 57, a former Christian Missionary from Waxhaw, North Carolina, who had worked on Bible translation in Mozambique. She was observed on CCTV sitting on a seat in the airport's Terminal 5 in the early hours of the morning and could then be seen walking over to baggage carousel 11 and climbing into its chute at 2.27am. The chute, normally used for delivering luggage to the carousel, led to a staff-only baggage facility. Vinton's body, though, was not discovered until 7.30, entangled with the conveyor in the baggage handling area with an electric cable around her neck. It is not known what Vinton was doing in the intervening period, nor is it entirely clear why she was in Chicago, although she did sometimes visit friends in the area. The Chicago coroner has ruled that Vinton's death was suicide. *editions.cnn.com, 9 Aug; dailymail.co.uk, 16 Aug 2024.*

In 2017, days before his 23rd birthday, Drew Kohn, from Jacksonville, Florida, was in a road accident that left him in a deep coma during which he was declared brain dead, with medics asking if they could use his organs for transplant. His mother, Yolanda Osborne-Kohn, refused, and took him home to care for him. After eight months in a coma, Kohn regained consciousness, saying "Yeah, Mom, I'm OK, I love you, Mom." He spent years in gruelling rehab, but learned to walk again, earning him widespread publicity for a "miracle recovery". However, early in the morning on 26 July, while walking on Collins Road in Jacksonville, Kohn was hit a by a pickup truck and killed instantly. ***nypost.com, 28 Jul 2024.***

Employees returning to work at a Wells Fargo Bank office in Tempe, Arizona, on Monday 19 August complained of a "foul odour" in the building, but it was dismissed as the result of bad plumbing. It was not until the following day that the actual source of the stench was tracked down: it was coming from Denise Prudhomme, 60, who was slumped over her desk in a cubicle in a secluded part of the office and had apparently been dead for several days. An investigation showed that Prudhomme had used her ID to scan into the building on Friday 16 August at 7am, but had never scanned out, suggesting that she had died some time that day and had sat undiscovered in her cubicle for four days until being spotted on the following Tuesday by a colleague who was walking around the building. Police did not suspect foul play and were awaiting an autopsy to identify her exact cause of death. *nypost.com 29 Aug 2024.*

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